

THE BOY SETTLER



EDWIN L. SABIN







See page 120.

THUNDER HORSE GRABBED VAINLY AT HIM AND WHEELED IN PURSUIT.

THE BOY SETTLER

OR

TERRY IN THE NEW WEST

BY

EDWIN L. SABIN

AUTHOR OF "BAR B BOYS," "RANGE AND TRAIL," "SCARFACE RANCH," ETC.

Come muster, my lads, your mechanical tools,
Your saws and your axes, your hammers and rules;
Bring your mallets and planes, your level and line,
And plenty of pins of American pine:
For our roof we will raise, and our song still shall be,
A government firm, and our citizens free.

—*Old Song.*

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PRAIRIE PEOPLE

TERRY RICHARDS.....The Boy Settler
HIS FATHER.....Who Has a Strange Adventure
HIS MOTHER.....Terry's Best Help
GEORGE STANTON...Who Becomes Terry's New Brother
VIRGIE STANTON.....Rescued by Terry
FALL LEAF.....Delaware Chief
GENERAL JACKSON.....Terry's Delaware Friend
THUNDER HORSE.....A Troublesome Kiowa
MR. and MRS. STANTON.....Good Neighbors
SOL JUDY.....Another Friend in Need
HARRY REVERE.....Terry's Partner
SHEP.....Brave Dog
CAPTAIN STEUART }
LIEUTENANT ARNOLD }Of the U. S. Cavalry
SERGEANT MURPHY.....Plains Veteran

BUCK and SPOT, the Old Mare's Colt, the Tame Turkey,
the Half-Buffalo Calf, Pine Knot Ike, Jim, Ned,
John Bushman, and Other Folk of More or Less
Importance.

PLACE AND TIME: Kansas Territory of the New West,
in Emigrant Days.

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THE BOY SETTLER

CHAPTER I

WESTWARD HO!

"WHOA, Buck! Spot! Haw, now! Haw! Gee, Buck! Gee-up!"

Such was the tune lustily sung by young Terry Richards, trudging, whip in hand and big boots on feet, at the fore wheel of the wagon.

It was a large, white-hooded wagon, drawn by two oxen, one red, the other spotted. The red ox was Buck, the spotted ox of course was Spot. Framed in the puckered front end of the wagon hood was sitting Terry's mother; and the wagon was stuffed full of household furniture and of provisions and farming material, ending with a chicken-coop hung at the rear. Behind followed the old mare and her colt, with Terry's father riding the mare. And at Terry's heels paced Shep; good old Shep, the black shaggy dog.

The oxen tugged and grunted, their neck-yoke creaked, the wagon lurched and groaned, the three hens and the rooster pitched about and cried "Ka-daw-ka!" the colt whinnied, and as boss driver of the outfit Terry

in his muddy boots shouted: "Gee! Whoa! Gee! Yip with you, Spot! Yip!"

This was a great trip for Terry Richards. Now in the middle of April, 1858, he and his mother and father, with Shep and the oxen and the chickens and the mare and her colt had been on the road almost two weeks, from Kansas City, westward bound to the farm that his father had located out beyond the frontier in this new Territory of Kansas. Clear from Ohio had they come, first, to St. Louis, then by steamboat up the Missouri River to Kansas City, where Mr. Richards had left them while he went ahead to spy out the land.

He had found the place that he wanted—160 acres of Government land to be had for \$1.25 an acre. He had filed on it, and had put up a log cabin, and then he had hastened back to get the rest of the family. They had loaded the wagon full, and here they were, nearing "home."

By all accounts the home was going to be a fine one. Terry could see it all with his eyes shut, for his father had described it again and again. There was a cold clear spring just back of the cabin, and off yonder, cutting through the land, a creek; there was a large grove of trees, in easy sight from the house; there were acre after acre of grassy prairie, a little rolling but mostly flat, and in the distance some hills. There was a new town called Manhattan, south at the mouth of a river called the Big Blue; and southwest there was a new fort, named Fort Riley and garrisoned by United States soldiers, to fight the Indians. But from the cabin there was not a house in sight, and westward stretched a

regular Indian country—although Terry's father was certain that the wild Indians would not bother the white settlers who minded their own business.

Fun? Well, Terry rather expected a lot of fun, in the new home. His father had killed a deer in the timber by the creek, and every night turkeys flew there to roost!

At first the road from the Missouri River above Kansas City had been lively with other settlers and their wagons, outward bound, and with freighting outfits hauling enormous loads of supplies. For during this year and near a half score years to come, ere the railroads got through, the rolling country west from the Missouri River, into Kansas and Nebraska, was seamed by the prairie schooners of settler families traveling forward to make their new homes, like the Richards family were, and by the long trains of freight wagons, distributing supplies to town and store and fort.

The Indians yet seen by Terry in this Kansas Territory had not amounted to much. They had been tame Indians, living in cabins and tents on the reservations. First there were the Delawares, and next the Pottawattamies—Eastern Indians who had been moved here by the Government. Some of them worked in the fields, like white people; but the majority appeared to be lazy and dirty and shiftless, and spent their time begging from the settlers' wagons. It did not seem like the genuine Indian West until the reservations had been left behind, and most of the wagons had dropped off, and the road stretched on, toward the sunset, with

no settlements in sight, the wolves barking at night, and Terry driving the oxen alone except for his mother and father and Shep. Now, Terry firmly believed, the wild Indians might be encountered at almost any time.

When he wanted his oxen to turn to the right he ordered: "Gee, Buck! Spot!" When he wanted them to turn to the left he ordered: "Haw, Buck! Spot!" They were smart and knew what he meant. It was easier than driving by lines. The whip was one that he and his father had made from a hickory stock about four feet long and a braided buckskin lash about the same length; but the whip was only a threat, for the oxen were not to be struck except when they balked or acted up. This was very seldom. They were willing pullers. How they could jerk the heavy wagon out of a mudhole!

Another night's camp was drawing near. The sun was low above the range of hills to the west, toward which the narrow winding road, its black mud cut deep by wagon tracks, gradually led. On either side was the prairie, green with grass and spangled with early flowers. Here the prairie wolves or coyotes—yes, and the big gray wolves, also—prowled, waiting to feed on the oxen and horses that died along the way. A coyote crossed the road right ahead of the team. Shep's back bristled; he growled.

Terry's father trotted to the front, on the mare, to pick out a camping spot. All the day the prairie schooner of another settler on the march westward had occasionally been sighted, before, as it toiled up grade and down, at three miles an hour; but Terry had not

been able to catch it, for Buck and Spot were not to be hurried. Three miles an hour, or twenty miles a day, was enough, and they knew it. Now from the crest of a little rise Terry saw that the other wagon had halted, to make camp; and he was glad. Probably his father would decide to camp at the same place, and they would meet these people. That was one of the excitements of the trip: camping in company with fellow emigrants and learning all about them—where they came from and where they were going, and so forth and so forth.

The other wagon had been halted at one side of the road, in a shallow draw. By the time that the Richards' outfit arrived, the oxen had been unyoked, a fire started, and a tent was being put up. The campers were a man and woman and two children. Yes, hurrah! A boy about Terry's age, and a little girl. It would be fun to have another boy around, for a while, with whom to swap yarns of the trail.

"How are you?" greeted Terry's father, checking the old mare at the camp, while driving the oxen Terry followed him in. "Is there room for another party?"

"Howdy, howdy," heartily responded the man, pausing in the job of erecting the tent. Terry and the boy exchanged stares, sizing one another up. "Plenty of room. 'Light and unhitch. It's powerful lonesome in these parts, at night, and we're glad of your company."

He was a full-bearded, pleasant faced man, in costume much like that of Terry's father: felt hat and flannel shirt, and trousers tucked into heavy cowhide boots. The boy was wiry and snapping black-eyed,

and wore a huge pistol thrust through a leather strap around his waist. Against the wagon was leaning a long-barreled muzzle-loading rifle. Still, the strangers were not any better fixed than they, Terry decided; for his father had a Sharpe's rifle, and Colt's revolver too, and Terry carried in his pocket a new folding knife with blade of six inches. And in the wagon was a shot-gun.

"All right, Terry. Turn aside, off the road," bade his father.

"Buck! Spot! Gee! Gee with you! Hep! Hep! Whoa-oa! Now whoa!" And as skillfully as the best Terry landed the lumbering wagon in a good location off the trail. No black-eyed boy could beat that!

"Yes, it's terrible lonesome, here on the prairie at night," spoke the woman, from the fire, as Mrs. Richards climbed out. "'Specially when the wolves howl, or when the wind gets to blowing. Come over and make your fire next to ours. There's plenty fuel. Our boy'll show yours."

That sounded neighborly indeed. The first thing to do was to tie the mare to a wagon wheel. While the oxen were unyoked and turned out to grass and water Mrs. Richards sorted her cooking things from the wagon. Then while his father hauled forth the tent and bedding, Terry was supposed to gather fuel and start the fire. Then the tent was to be put up, and the bedding laid inside. And then Terry must bring water for his mother, and lead the mare to water and picket her out. And then he must help his mother at the fire, while his father made things shipshape in the tent and

the wagon, for the night. This was the regular routine. But before the oxen had been unyoked the black-eyed boy raised a shout.

"Indians! I see some Injuns coming!"

Sure enough, down the trail, out of the west, a file of horsemen were approaching. They were wrapped in blankets and buffalo robes, and bore lances which floated tufts like plumes. Yes, they were Indians. There must have been twenty of them. Shep seemed to smell them, for he growled. The old mare pricked her ears, gazing.

"You don't think they're wild Indians, do you?" quavered the woman at the fire.

"Oh, no, no," promptly answered Terry's father. "They look like reservation Indians, back from a hunt, probably."

"Then they won't bother us, I reckon," added the other man.

"They'd better not," swaggered the black-eyed boy, "unless they want to lose their scalps. See my pistol?" he invited, of Terry.

"George! You stay right here and let them alone," ordered his mother.

George winked at Terry, and grinned.

"I was just fooling," he said. "I won't hurt 'em. But I'm not afraid of 'em, anyhow." Terry was not certain whether George was in earnest or was pretending. A boy with such black eyes was likely to be pretty spunky.

The Indians did not continue on down to the wagons. They stopped on the farther side of the creek that cut the trail, and appeared to be making camp there.

"Will you get me some wood now, Terry, please?" reminded his mother.

"I'll show you where there's a lot of it, dry—and I know where some buffalo chips are, too," volunteered the black-eyed boy. "Bring your gunny-sack and ax."

So fishing out a gunny-sack and grabbing the ax, Terry followed him, away from the camp and up the shallow draw.

"My name's George Stanton; what's yours?" demanded the black-eyed boy.

"Terry Richards. We're from Ohio. Where are you from?"

"Indiana. We're going on out west, clear into the Indian country."

"So are we," informed Terry.

"How far?"

"Beyond the Big Blue River. My father's filed on 160 acres."

"That's where we're going, too," asserted George. "But we're going to Fort Riley first, to 'tend to some business. Where's your land located?"

Terry was hazy as to this, because he never had been there; and he soon found that George did not know much more. However, they agreed that maybe they would live near enough to one another so that they could have fun together.

"Is that your dog?" queried George. "What's his name?"

"Shep. He'll tackle anything, too. He keeps watch nights."

"We don't need a dog. I've got my big pistol," answered George. "Ma's afraid of it. Are you?"

"Naw," laughed Terry. "I've shot guns. I've shot my father's."

"Well, you can't shoot this one, and neither can anybody else. 'Cause why? 'Cause it won't shoot. See? It's busted."

And so it was—"busted." It had a hammer whittled from wood and painted black. But it *looked* like a shooter.

"There's a log you can chop at," directed George, briskly. "That's where we got our dry wood. Give me your sack and I'll fill it with buffalo chips. I found a lot of 'em, in a hollow yonder among some willows where buffalo have been standing out of the flies."

Away he went, with the sack. Terry chopped, and presently George came back, the sack bulging with buffalo chips—which were the dried refuse deposited by buffalo. These chips burned hot, holding the fire and making no smoke. Buffalo chips were better than wood, for cooking.

In the twilight under a golden sky they trudged to the camp, lugging their fuel. Shep growled and bristled, for a couple of the Indians had ridden in, to visit. One was a middle-aged man, wearing an eagle's feather in his straight black hair. He had a square, dark, wrinkled face and just the suspicion of a coarse scraggly moustache; his face was not at all unpleasing, although rather stern. The other Indian was much younger, handsome and slender. They were armed with rifles.

"I guess they're Delawares," whispered George. "Say did you ever read 'Last of the Mohicans,' by Cooper?"

"Of course," replied Terry, dumping his wood beside the little fire that had already been started from twigs and scraps. But before he could say more, his father called.

"Take the old mare down to water, Terry, and then we'll stake her out."

"You'll have to water her at the creek," put in George, "so as not to roil the spring. The creek's near the Injuns, but we don't care."

"Say 'Indians,' not 'Injuns,' George," corrected his mother. "And don't you interfere with them, but come right back."

"Yes, ma'am," answered George. "Delawares are all right; they're friends of the whites," he asserted, to Terry, as they started. But now his little sister ran after.

"I'm going, too," she cried.

"Virginia!" cautioned her mother—who certainly seemed to have her hands full keeping track of the family. "You be careful, and stay close to brother."

"Yes, 'm," gaily piped Virginia. "My name's Virgie; what's yours?" she announced, to Terry, as she took hold of her brother's hand.

Terry told her. She was a fair little girl, the very opposite of George in spite of her tan. She wore a red-and-white checked calico frock, and was bare-footed and bare-headed.

"And I'm seven going on eight," she added, proudly.

"Remember Uncas and Chingachgook, in 'Last of the Mohicans'?" queried George, of Terry, as they proceeded, Terry leading the old mare, her colt ambling

behind. "They were same as Delawares. Jiminy, wasn't that a fine book, though? I've read it six times. It's funny to have the Delawares in Kansas. Wonder if they didn't hate to be moved."

"Well, they got crowded out by the whites, back East," replied Terry. "My father says all the tame Indians ought to be put in an Indian Territory by themselves, where they can make their own laws and not be bothered by the whites."

"They can't mix with the wild Indians, of the plains," declared George. "The plains Indians won't have 'em. The plains Indians can lick 'em, too, mostly—except the Delawares. My father says a Delaware can lick a Cheyenne any day; but these Pottawattamies and Kaws and Osages aren't much good. I'd like to see a Cheyenne or a Sioux—a regular wild one who lives out in the plains or mountains."

"We may see more than we want to, if they come raiding some day," reminded Terry.

"I wouldn't be afraid, if my pistol was fixed," boldly claimed George.

They had reached the creek a little below the Indian camp on the opposite side. The camp was a lively place. Half a dozen lodges of canvas and hide had been erected; Indian women were cooking with pots over fires, a few children were running about playing, the men were lounging here and there, and ponies were grazing. Some of the Indians wore a civilized costume: the women in torn calico, the men in old trousers and shirts and hats. For the Delawares, like the Pottawattamies and Kaws and Kickapoos and others of the

Kansas tame Indians were being taught by agents and schools to live as much as possible like white people.

Terry hauled the snorting old mare to the water's edge, and waited for her to drink. He and George and Virgie stared across at the camp. The next thing they knew, the mare gave an extra loud snort, Shep growled fiercely and slunk against his master's legs, and a voice said gutturally:

"Umph! How much?"

A tremendously ugly Indian stood beside them, his hand, with long dirty nails, outstretched to grasp the mare's lead-rope. He did not look at all like the Delawares or Pottawattamies whom Terry had seen. His black hair was cut straight across the front, in a bang; one half was braided, but the other half hung only to his ear. His face was painted and pock pitted; and his breath smelled strongly of liquor.

"How much?"

Terry jumped, snatching the rope away from the hand.

"No," he stammered, shaking his head.

"You trade. Me big Injun. How much?" And the pock-faced Indian lurched toward him again.

"No!" repeated Terry. "I won't sell, or trade, either."

"Humph! You no trade, mebbe I take," threatened the Indian, with a scowl. "Mebbe I kill, huh? White boy no trade, white boy die; Injun take pony, little pony, scalp, all." And with surprising quickness he made a spring at Terry and the rope.

Terry leaped backward; and at the same instant the

old mare flung up her head with a snort, jerking the rope from Terry's hand and sending him sprawling. Away galloped the mare, back for the wagons. Rolling over and over, Terry was aware that the ugly Indian had made a grab for the colt as it wheeled past him—and Terry kept on rolling for fear that the Indian was to make a grab for him, next.

But he heard George order, shrilly:

“Halt! Bang! You halt, you big fool!”

Picking himself up, Terry saw the Indian, swaying and blinking, held by the muzzle of George's dragoon pistol.

“You move, I shoot—bang! Kill Injun,” instructed George, planted sturdily, and scowling. “Hurt you, Terry?”

“No,” declared Terry. “And he didn't get the mare or colt. Who is he?”

“He almost got *you*, though,” asserted George. “You follow the horses while I keep him covered.” And—“Gwan home with you,” ordered George, to the Indian.

Suddenly the Indian, who had been steadily glaring, his black eyes like two narrow coals, made another spring, as swift as any panther; was upon George in a jiffy, wrenched the pistol from his grasp, and seized him by the shoulder. George let out one horrified yelp, and twisted in vain.

“Uh!” grunted the big Indian. “Pistol no shoot. Cut off white boy's head now.” And holding George he swayed about while tucking the pistol into his blanket as if preparatory to drawing his scalping-knife.

This may have been an Indian joke, but it was no joke to George or Terry—no, nor to little Virgie. Her voice uplifted in a shrill wail of anger and dismay; and bravely clinging to the Indian's blanket she pummeled him as hard as she could, demanding:

"You let my brother go! Let him go, quick! Don't you dare hurt him."

Terry was uncertain, just for a moment, whether to dive and light on the Indian, and help George that way, or whether first to yell for stronger help; when, with a wriggle and a furious volley of kicks, by aid of Virgie, George had almost upset the Indian, had peeled out of his jacket, and picking up Virgie was legging it down the road.

Away ran George, and after him lunged the Indian, faster.

"Run!" cried Terry, with a cheer. Then with sudden thought he added: "Sick, Shep! Sick him! Take him, boy!"

That was encouragement enough for Shep. He knew. He had been watching the struggle, his ears pricked. With eager whine forth he darted. In a few more strides the big Indian would have had George, and Virgie too, but Shep was there like an arrow. Terry had scarcely run at all, following the Indian and Shep, when Shep launched for the Indian's legs, and through the flapping blanket had sunk his teeth into the bare sinewy calf beneath.

Shep hung hard; down pitched the Indian, to hands and knees; Shep nimbly leaped aside; up staggered the Indian, blazing mad, and in response to Shep's snarling teeth out came the Indian's rusty knife.

"Shep!" called Terry, in alarm, running on to rescue in earnest.

But rushing past him somebody interrupted. There was the thud of another Indian figure, a grunt and a powerful swing of an arm, and as flat as a pancake was knocked the first Indian, to lie stunned and motionless.

"Humph!" panted the elder of the two Delawares whom Terry had seen at the wagons—for he it was. "Bad Injun. Him drunk Kiowa. No good."

He still carried his rifle, but he had not used it. His fist had been enough.

CHAPTER II

INDIAN FRIENDS

THAT was a sudden and a very welcome interruption.

"Much obliged," panted Terry, arriving, to the Delaware.

"Heap dog," praised the Delaware, eyeing Shep, who was slinking up, hair bristling, nose outstretched, to sniff at his late foe. The Delaware stooped and picked up George's pistol, which had fallen from the Kiowa's blanket folds. "Pistol no good," he grunted. "Dog better. How much?"

"For what?" asked Terry.

"Dog. Trade?"

"You couldn't buy that dog for ten thousand dollars," grinned Terry. "Heap dog. No sell him."

"He hit him an awful swat, didn't he!" wheezed George, who had turned at Shep's snarling charge, and had seen what had followed. "But Shep is what saved me, I guess. If it hadn't been for Shep that Injun'd have got me. Wonder what he'd have done. He isn't a Delaware." And—"Did you kill him?" he asked, of the Delaware.

"No hurt much," grunted the chief, stirring the prostrate figure rudely with his moccasined toe. "Fist good 'nough for Kiowa. Get alive soon. No be drunk then."

"Cracky! That's a Kiowa, he says," exclaimed George. "They're bad Injuns, regular wild ones, of the Southwest plains."

They gazed down in some awe at this "regular wild Injun"—who lying there sprawled, with blood-shot eyes half open and face pock pitted, did not present a very inspiring appearance.

Little Virgie, frightened, clung to her brother's trousers, and gazed, too.

"I don't like him," she whispered.

The other Delaware, who was the young one, only a little older than Terry or George, came in, bringing George's coat. He spoke better English than the chief.

"You from that camp," he said. "This my uncle—Fall Leaf—him big chief. Me name General Jackson. What name—you?"

"My name's Terry Richards and his is George Stanton," answered Terry.

"She got 'um name?" queried General Jackson, pointing to Virgie.

"That's his sister; her name's Virgie Stanton."

"He got 'um name?" pursued General Jackson, pointing at Shep.

"Yes. His name's Shep. He's my dog."

"Good dog. Heap good dog. Sell 'um? No?"

"Not on your life," asserted Terry, stanchly.

"That's my pistol, too," hinted George.

"Good. No shoot. Use fist on Kiowa," agreed General Jackson.

Fall Leaf handed back the pistol to George, with a shrug of the shoulders which indicated that he did not think much of such a weapon.

"Whiskey bad; make Injun foolish," spoke General Jackson. "When Kiowa wake up now, he forget."

"What's he doing? Visiting you folks?" asked George.

"Yes. Make visit; eat, drink; go home quick."

"Where does he live?"

"Way off; no Delaware; Kiowa," and General Jackson pointed to the southwest. "Him name Thunder Horse. Bah!"

"I'm glad he's not a Delaware," said George, to Terry.

Fall Leaf grunted, and held out his hand.

"Good-by," he bade. "Come 'gain, mebbe. Heap dog," for he seemed to have a great admiration for Shep. "Fight 'um Injun in leg!" And he and General Jackson laughed.

They all shook hands, except little Virgie, who shrank and declined.

"Good-by," said the boys.

"Where you go?"

"Out beyond the Big Blue."

"Make 'um home?" queried Fall Leaf.

"Yes."

"Delaware been hunting. Next time go, mebbe see you."

"All right. Stop in, any time," they replied.

Leading Virgie, the boys proceeded down the trail, to camp. With a final growl at the prostrate Kiowa, as if saying: "We fixed *you*!" Shep trotted after. The two Delawares went back to their ponies, leaving the Kiowa lying. Glancing behind them, the boys saw

him presently move, and sit up, and rubbing his head stagger to his feet.

"Wonder if he'll hold a grudge against us and try to hurt us, sometime," remarked Terry. "I'd hate to have him after us again."

"Aw, they said he was drunk and wouldn't remember," reminded George. "But I'm going to get this pistol mended and be ready for him next time."

But the Kiowa went reeling for his own camp. However, this was not the last of that Kiowa; not by any means.

The mare and her colt already had arrived at the camp—the mare with her lead-rope dragging. Nobody had seen the fracas, but notified by the mare, who had come so unceremoniously, Mr. Richards and Mr. Stanton both had been looking anxiously, puzzled at the group around the stunned Kiowa.

"What's the matter at the creek?" demanded Terry's father, of him. But little Virgie ran forward excitedly.

"A big bad Indian took George's pistol and chased him and that dog bit him right in the leg and then another Indian knocked him over and killed him dead," she announced, with so many "him's" that nobody could understand what she was driving at.

"How's that?" asked Mr. Stanton, sharply. "Who chased whom and who knocked *whom* over?"

"We were watering the horses and an Indian wanted to buy them, and when I wouldn't sell he chased us. He wasn't afraid of George's pistol so I sicked Shep to tackle him—" began Terry.

"And Shep stopped him or he'd have got me, but the Delaware chief knocked him flat. Can't I have that pistol fixed?" finished George.

"I declare!" exclaimed both mothers.

"Anybody hurt?" queried Mr. Richards.

"Nobody but the Kiowa. He was drunk, anyhow," answered Terry. "He's not hurt much, though. His name is Thunder Horse."

"He's a wild Injun—a regular wild one, pop," informed George. "But the Delaware chief—you ought to have seen how he knocked him. Said he used his fist on Kiowas, didn't need to shoot 'em. He's Fall Leaf and the other Delaware is General Jackson."

"What's the Kiowa doing there, though?" asked his father, keenly. "Any more of them?"

"Don't think so. He's visiting the Delawares. He'll go home now. And we're going hunting with the Delawares, as soon as we get settled; aren't we, Terry!"

"Sure thing. They invited us," concurred Terry.

"I like Delawares; don't like Kiowas," piped Virgie.

"No, nor does anybody else," agreed her father. And her mother bade:

"Now, Virgie, you and George stay right here, and don't you stir a step away from the wagons."

"But, ma!" objected George, much disgusted. "There isn't going to be any massacre. Those Injuns are all friendly, except the one Kiowa, and who's afraid of *him*! Wait till I get my pistol fixed!"

Anyway, that had been an adventure, and would give lots to talk about. However, Terry, too, had to stay close and help his mother at supper.

"I'll be so glad when I have a stove, again, to cook on," sighed Mrs. Richards.

"That won't be long now," encouraged Mr. Richards. "The first thing that Terry and I do when we all get to the cabin will be to set up your stove and you can begin to cook right away."

"And you'll be as ready for pie and such things as I am to make them," she laughed.

"Pie!" exclaimed Terry, his mouth watering. "What kind, ma?"

"You wait and see."

"Best gather some of that dry wood, Terry, and stow it under cover," directed his father. "The sky looks like rain, and we don't want to cook breakfast with wet wood."

Terry, his mouth still watering at the thought of pie, tucked some breakfast wood in the wagon.

"They're having a big storm up yonder," called Mr. Stanton, pointing to the northwest.

"Heap wet," added George, slyly, to Terry. "Big Thunder chief on rampage."

"Maybe it's Thunder Horse," laughed Terry, referring to the Kiowa.

"Naw," grinned George. "He no like that kind water; heap like fire water. Hooh!"

The horizon in the northwest certainly was black and lowering, and by the time that supper was over, the mutterings of thunder could be heard. Now it behooved both wagon parties to make their camp secure for a stormy night. Terry and his father drew the wagon cover tight at the ends, and threw a rope across,

which they staked fast and handed taut, to hold the wagon firm. Sometimes these storms on the western prairies blew tremendously. The tent was tautened, too, and a ditch dug around the edges.

After Terry's mother had turned in, by light of a lantern, Terry and his father followed. Already the first scud of the approaching storm had dimmed the stars, and when the lantern was extinguished the darkness was pitchy.

Feeling like a real frontiersman, Terry snuggled in his blanket and quilts. Coyotes were yapping, near at hand; but he was not afraid of them. A wolf—sounded like a big fellow—howled a foraging call, as he prowled along the trail. This made Shep, curled against the tent on the outside, growl indignantly. Terry smiled. Good old Shep! He would guard the camp. Now the wind began to blow puffily, moaning and whispering, as if it might be the spirits of Indians exploring the white man's camp. Yes, the rain was coming, sure. But who cared, if only it did not beat through the canvas and wet them all.

The Stanton camp had been dark and silent, when Terry had crawled in. George and Virgie evidently were asleep; and presently Terry drowsed off, while reviewing his tussle with the big Kiowa and thinking of what he might have done, but didn't. Those were fine Delawares, though—Fall Leaf and young General Jackson. It would be fun to hunt with them. Hee-yaw—and Terry yawned and began to dream.

He was awakened by the storm. The rain was drumming fiercely on the canvas, lashing and slashing,

and the wind tugged until the whole tent strained and creaked. The lightning flared white and dazzling, while the world shook to the bellow of the thunder.

Shep was howling and whining, and scratching at the flaps. Usually he crept under the wagon, but tonight he was getting enough, early. By the lightning Terry saw his father sit up, and get up, and open the flaps a mite; instantly in squeezed Shep, whimpering gladly, to shake himself, lick Terry's face, and cuddle down in a corner.

"Why, Shep. Poor Shep," spoke Terry's mother. "Goodness, what a storm! Does the tent leak, Ralph?"

"No, but the ground does," replied Terry's father. "The water's coming under the edges. The ditch has over-flowed, I reckon."

"Jiminy! I should say!" announced Terry, suddenly conscious that he was getting wet underneath instead of on top. Yes, he was lying in a little puddle! Huh!

"Well, we'll have to take it," laughed his father. "If you don't like it, Terry, you can go outside with the lantern and dig the ditch deeper. But the storm won't last long, at this rate. It's blowing great guns."

"You'd better move, Terry," called his mother anxiously.

"I'd advise you to stay where you are," bade his father. "You've warmed the puddle, and you're liable to get into a fresh cold one."

"Guess I'll stay, then," said Terry, sleepily. At any rate, he was glad to be here instead of out with the

cattle. And drawing up his feet, to curl closer, he actually went to sleep again, to the tune of Shep's snoring.

When he awakened, it was daylight; the sun was shining, the storm was over with, and the puddle had sunk into the sandy soil. He was almost dry. Now he could tell George how he had slept in the water and it hadn't hurt him; his father was already outside, so was Shep; and pulling on his trousers and boots, out he went, too, to leave his mother to dress herself.

Everything looked fresh and bright. Over at the other wagon George and his father were busy; and Terry, washing his face in the tin basin, waved at them.

"Did you get wet?" he called, to George.

"No, did you?"

"Not much. Slept in a puddle, is all. But it was fun."

"I'd just as lief, too. Wonder if the Injuns got wet. It would do that Kiowa good to be soaked a little."

"That's right," answered Terry, with a chuckle.

The fire was blazing, and the coffee-pot was on.

"Bring up the oxen, Terry," bade his father, "and I'll be opening the wagon and tent and spreading things to dry. We'll put the oxen to the wagon while breakfast is cooking, so as to make an early start. We may have difficulty crossing the river, after this rain."

Buck and Spot were peacefully grazing, not far distant; their hides were washed clean by the night's deluge. The old mare and her colt also were busy getting their breakfast, in a hurry as if they foresaw that

time was valuable. Terry grabbed up the big yoke, where it leaned against the wagon-wheel; slung it over his shoulder, and thrusting his arm through the two bows, started for Buck and Spot, across the wet and sparkling prairie.

They saw him coming, of course, and stared expectantly, knowing that their day's work was about to begin.

"Whoa, Spot; whoa, now, old fellow," soothed Terry.

He had been taught just how to do it, and he rather hoped that George was watching. He laid one end of the heavy yoke over Spot's burly neck, passed the half-circle of the bow under, and thrusting the morticed ends up through the holes in the yoke, slipped in the pin, that held the bow to the yoke. Then he let the yoke hang, while he drove Buck beside Spot, who waited. Buck knew what was expected. He sidled in, to Spot, until Terry could lift the yoke and lay the other end on his neck, also, and adjust the bow.

Then all that remained to do was to drive them, a pair, to the wagon, where his father was ready to help him lift the tongue and insert it through the ring hanging from the middle of the yoke.

The Stantons were hustling, too; and after breakfast camp was broken, and the two wagons pulled out together.

"We'll probably have to double up, at the ford," shouted back Mr. Stanton, as he led out.

Virgie was riding in their wagon, with her mother. Mr. Stanton drove the oxen, and George dropped back to walk with Terry.

Terry cracked his whip.

"Buck! Spot! Hep with you. Gee! Haw—yip! Go on with you!"

Into the muddy trail the wagon creaked, following in the wake of the Stanton wagon.

"The Injuns haven't started yet; see?" remarked George. "Guess they're eating breakfast. Wonder if the big Kiowa'll remember us?"

"I don't care if he does," stoutly replied Terry. "Fall Leaf'll tend to *him*. Get on. We'll have to ride, crossing the creek."

Into the clear air was rising blue smoke from the Indians' fires, around which squaws were busy cooking breakfast, in iron pots. A number of the men were lounging about, waiting; and the pony herd was grazing out a little way. The wagon trail for the west skirted an edge of the camp; the Delaware dogs began to bark, Shep growled and bristled in answer; and as the Stanton wagon lumbered through the shallow creek (which was running swift and muddy) and on up the other bank, Fall Leaf himself rose, and held up his hand as signal for it to stop.

So it did, at the camp; and so did the Richards' wagon, close behind.

"Crickity! Wonder what's the matter," spoke George, tumbling off, and hustling forward in his important way. Terry's father rode to where Fall Leaf was speaking with Mr. Stanton.

Presently, while Terry and his mother curiously waited on the seat, Mr. Richards came back.

"You're needed ahead, Mary," he spoke, to Terry's

mother, with a smile. "What have you got for sore eyes?"

"That borax and rosewater lotion," said Terry's mother, triumphantly. "Why?"

"One of the Delaware women has bad eyes, the chief says. Wants us white people to doctor her. The Stantons haven't anything; and Mrs. Stanton seems afraid of Indians, anyway. Do you want to try your hand?"

"Why, of course," declared Terry's mother, turning and reaching for what Terry called her "wonder worker"—which was a little box that held various remedies for common ailments: a sort of "first aid to the injured" kit. Out she nimbly hopped, and hastened on with Terry's father. Terry could stand his curiosity no longer; and leaving Buck and Spot, carrying his whip he followed close.

At sight of Mrs. Richards and her box, Fall Leaf gave a satisfied grunt, and beckoning led the way to one of the tipis. He opened the flaps, and motioned to Mrs. Richards to enter.

"Oh, I wouldn't go in there for the world!" called Mrs. Stanton, from her wagon.

"Shucks! Ma's more afraid of Injuns than she is of rattlesnakes," grunted George, to Terry "I can't make her believe these are friendly Delawares." And——

"There's Thunder Horse!" he whispered. "Don't look too quick."

"Where?"

"Over there. On our right."

Terry fairly felt two eyes burning into him, and knew that they were the two eyes of the Kiowa. He slowly turned his head aside. Yes, the Kiowa it was. He was sitting on the ground, as if he might not be very well; and how he was scowling! His pock-marked ugly face was set in a fierce glare of hatred, directed straight at the two boys. Evidently he did remember, and evidently he was still very angry.

"I'm glad Shep didn't come," whispered Terry.

"What's he going to do now, I wonder," whispered back George. "He'd better not come over here."

"And he'd better not tackle Shep, either," answered Terry.

For the Kiowa, knowing that they saw him, rose unsteadily to his feet, and scowling as before made a step toward them.

However, luckily General Jackson interfered. Maybe he had been watching. At any rate, there was a quick footfall, behind the boys, and a voice said:

"How do do?"

The young Delaware, General Jackson, extended his hand, to shake.

They shook, and exchanged grins with him.

"Thunder Horse—very mad," ventured Terry, with jerk of his head at the Kiowa.

"No hurt you," replied General Jackson, quickly. And he shouted angrily at the Kiowa, and motioned with his hand. At this, Thunder Horse, with a parting scowl, turned and lurched out of sight.

"Your mudder?" queried General Jackson, of Terry, pointing at the tipi within which Mrs. Richards had disappeared.

"Yes," said Terry.

"My mudder. She got bad eyes. Mebbe you mudder she cure 'um," proceeded General Jackson.

"She surely will," asserted Terry, loyally. "My mother big medicine."

"Good," nodded the young Delaware.

Out of the tipi now came Mr. Richards and Mr. Stanton, next came Terry's mother, and Fall Leaf followed.

"Did you cure her?" asked Terry, anxiously, as the party approached, on the way to the wagons again.

His mother smiled and nodded brightly.

"It did her lots of good, anyway. I left her some of the lotion, to use. The poor thing! She could scarcely see, because of sties."

Terry knew exactly how pleased his mother was; nothing tickled her more than to "doctor" somebody. And the chief seemed pleased, too, for he shook hands all around again, and bid the party good-by with many a friendly wave.

"Well, we've made friends of those Delawares, at least, Mary," remarked Terry's father, as the wagon started on. "And they may be friends in need, some day."

CHAPTER III

THE ACCIDENT AT WILDCAT CREEK

THE road was sticky, in places, but the day was glorious; and about mid-morning they came in sight of a line of timber, crossing the way before.

"There's the Big Blue," called Terry's father. "Now we'll see if we can cross it." And on the mare he loped ahead, to reconnoiter.

He was waiting when the wagons drew up. The road dipped into the hither shallows, disappeared, and emerged again on the farther bank, to continue across the rolling prairie to the other side of the broad valley. But between the two banks rolled a heavy muddy tide, swelled by the night's rain.

Mr. Stanton rode to consult with Mr. Richards; Mrs. Stanton and Terry's mother peered out from the wagon hoods, and with George and Virgie (who was gaily playing along on foot, carrying a great rag doll) Terry left his oxen and trudged to join in the council.

"Jiminy! She's a-booming, isn't she!" exclaimed George, excited, as the river unfolded close at hand. "Can you swim? I can."

"Sure," said Terry.

"I can't," piped Virgie, beginning to weep. "And mamma can't, either. Do we have to stay here?"

"No," answered George. "Don't cry. Shep can swim and we'll put you on his back and he'll take you right across; won't he, Terry!"

"Of course," assured Terry.

"And mamma, too?"

"You bet. She can ride on one of the oxen."

This pleased Virgie, and she had high hopes again.

The crossing did look rather formidable. The current ran swirling and dark; and here were the two high, heavy wagons to be hauled through. Terry's father rode in, on the mare, until the water was above his knees; he pushed on a little further, until well out toward the middle. The water lapped half way up his thighs. The colt gazed after and whinnied uneasily, prancing along the water's edge. Mr. Richards forced the old mare until it seemed that she was swimming; but just as Terry gave a gasp of alarm and his mother uttered a little cry, the mare began to climb higher and higher, and streaming with the water she bore him out and clambered with him safely up the opposite bank. He waved his hand triumphantly, and turned back, coming in the same manner that he went.

"It's a hard bottom," he called, as he arrived in the shallows again. "We can make it but we'll have to double up."

"We'd better put a rope on, hadn't we?" suggested Mr. Stanton. "And pay out with it so as to hold the wagons up-stream."

"Yes, sir. If you'll get out your rope we'll join the two. Where's our rope, Terry? The large one."

Terry fished out from the wagon the stout rope that

they carried for emergencies (it was the same with which they had guyed the wagon down, for the storm), Mr. Stanton had fished out his, and now knotted the two together.

"You're ahead. We'll send you over first," proposed Mr. Richards, to him. "Bring up Buck and Spot, and the chain, Terry."

"We have a chain," said Mr. Stanton. "I'll get it."

Buck and Spot were uncoupled from the Richards wagon, and Terry drove them forward, to where Mr. Stanton was waiting, in front of his own span, with the heavy ox chain in his hand. The chain was hooked to Buck and Spot's yoke, and stretched back between them, to be hooked by the other end to the yoke of the Stanton span.

Terry's father meanwhile had fastened an end of the rope to the rear axle of the wagon, and was carrying the other end to a tree which stood on the bank, conveniently just above the ford.

"How are your oxen? Pretty steady?" queried Mr. Stanton.

"Steady as a rock, sir," assured Mr. Richards. "I'll ride the mare over, as a toll for them. They'll follow. The boys can pay out the rope, if you'll do the driving. Do you want to sort your load? The bottom things are liable to get wet?"

"No, sir. We travel ready for this kind of thing. Perishable stuff on top."

"All right. Then go ahead. Now, you two boys have got to tend to the rope. Pay out around the tree,

as we go, and keep the rope just taut enough to hold the wagon across-current and keep it from slewing."

"We will. Come on, George," bade Terry.

"Climb in, Virgie," directed her father; and he lifted her beside her mother, and climbed aboard himself, whip in hand. The seat was roomy enough for the three.

Mr. Richards rode into the river, on the mare.

"Now! Yip! Yip with you! Buck! Spot! Bonny!" shouted Mr. Stanton, and his lash cracked.

The four oxen obediently strained, with heads low. Creaking, for the water's edge rolled the wagon.

"Give the rope slack until we're well out," shouted back Mr. Richards, to Terry and George.

Without hesitating, Buck and Spot splashed into the water; after them plashed Bonny and Ned, the Stanton oxen. All four snorted and grunted a bit, as the water reached their bellies, but they kept on, to the encouragement of Mr. Stanton's voice and cracking lash. They had forded rivers before this, of course, on the trail out from the Missouri; but none so rapid and muddy.

The wagon settled deeper, to the hubs, and over, and now the current clutched at the straining oxen's flanks. Their eyes bulged, and as they surged forward they snorted and blew the spray. Mr. Stanton shouted lustily; for if the wagon stopped its tires might sink into some soft spot and stick fast. With the water up to the wagon-box, the wagon began to slew down-stream.

The slack of the rope straightened. Terry's father looked anxiously behind, as if in signal, and also to watch the oxen and wagon.

"Now! Hold hard, and pay out, George," uttered Terry, with grip on the rope, beyond the tree.

The rope had been wound twice around, for friction. The tree trunk was worn smooth, as if it had been used as an anchor, before. Braced, and holding hard, the two boys let the rope slip foot by foot as the wagon proceeded. The current dragged at the rope, bending it in a curve where it entered the water; and once in a while it whipped almost free when the wagon gave a jump forward.

"Easy with her," grunted George.

"Easy," responded Terry, likewise grunting with the strain and care. "She isn't stuck, is she?"

In mid-stream the wagon seemed to hang for a moment; the water was well up against the box, tugging to swing the wagon down with the current, and the current itself eddied high against the oxen's sides, even washing their backs.

"Yip! Buck! Bonny! Yip! Out with you!" shouted Mr. Stanton; and his lash hissed over the blowing, panting team.

Were they swimming? Would they make it? George cried excitedly, answering the question.

"They're pulling out! Hooray!"

"Hooray!" cheered Terry. And the rope slipped another few turns.

The old mare, bearing Mr. Richards, who twisted in his saddle to look behind him, was climbing higher; and following close, Buck and Spot and next Bonny and Ned, also climbed higher, for the water began to recede down their wet hides. Then the wagon

emerged, little by little, until at sign of lifted hand from Terry's father it halted. He rode around and cast off the rope from the rear axle. The crossing had been accomplished. Good!

Plashing through the shallows, the dripping wagon and oxen and Mr. Richards emerged upon the bank and proceeded on, up the trail, until they might halt again, in safety. Little Virgie peered around the hood and waved her rag doll at the two boys.

But no time was to be wasted in bragging. Terry's father and George's hastened to unhook the oxen, and turn them about and start them back for the Richards' wagon. Now Mr. Richards led the way, as before; and wading in to his waist, Mr. Stanton urged the oxen ahead. He stood ready to wade further, if necessary; but the four oxen continued obediently, with noses out-pointed for the opposite shore.

"Haul the rope in, boys," called Mr. Richards, "so we can use it on this other wagon."

"Terry," he said, when the team had been put to the wagon, and the rope attached as before, "you can do the driving, this time. George and I'll stay over here, to manage the rope, and if you get in trouble I'll ride out at once and help you. But you'll have no trouble. Just keep the team headed for that dead tree, and you'll land where you belong. It's hard bottom, if you keep the ford. You can do it, can't you?"

"Of course," asserted Terry.

"I can do it," proposed George, eagerly. "I know how to drive. Let me drive and he can stay with the rope."

"No, siree," stoutly protested Terry. "That's my job." And for fear that it might be taken from him he hustled for the wagon and climbed aboard. Drive across? Certainly he would!

"How'll *I* get over?" he heard George appeal, as if struck with the sudden thought.

"I'll carry you on the mare," answered Mr. Richards.

"Well, I could swim, anyhow," bluffed George, confidently.

"Go ahead, Terry," bade his father.

"Now, Terry! don't you get me wet!" laughed his mother, a little anxiously nevertheless.

"Buck! Spot! Ned! Hep! Haw! Hep with you!"

The oxen required no guidance from the mare. They forged right along, and with occasional "Haw!" and crack of whip Terry kept them headed slightly up, lining for the dead tree. It was great fun, to be perched here on the seat, taking his mother and the wagon across. It was a little ticklish, too, as the water rose higher, and the wagon swayed, and the oxen blew spray and snorted, and there in mid-stream the outfit seemed to stick, just for a moment.

"Spot! What's the matter with yuh! Yip, now! Yip! Buck! Bonny! Ned! Hi!" exhorted Terry; and on lurched the wagon, through the deepest place—and the danger was past.

Virgie, on the bank before, was waving her doll and cheering; and Mr. Stanton stood prepared to rush to the rescue. But now the water was lessening in depth;

Buck and Spot were clambering gladly ever higher; and so were Bonny and Ned; and the trail was only a few wagon-lengths' distant. They made it, as easy as pie—dragging the rope which Mr. Richards and George had let go.

Through the ford followed the old mare, bearing double—George, gaily riding behind the saddle, clinging fast to Terry's father.

"You a'lmost got stuck, didn't you?" accused George, breathlessly. "Looked like it."

"No, I didn't," denied Terry. "We didn't stop once. Shucks. 'Twasn't anything at all."

"There comes the colt," laughed Mr. Stanton, pointing.

Sure enough; finding himself abandoned, the frantic colt had at last plunged in, and wading and swimming, while his mother whinnied shrill encouragement, was landed down stream. Much rejoiced, he galloped to his mother for congratulations.

Well done, everybody!

"I wasn't afraid! I wasn't a bit afraid," declared Virgie, capering about. "I liked it."

"Do you want to overhaul the things and see what got wet in the bottom of the wagon?" asked Mr. Richards, of Terry's mother.

"No, I don't think so. We ought to go on, oughtn't we? Isn't there another river to cross?"

"Yes. Wildcat Creek, at what they call the upper ford."

"You're going up that way, are you?" remarked Mr. Stanton, while he hooked his oxen again, to his own

wagon. "Well, I've got to go to Fort Riley, by the main road."

The main road bore off to the southward, presently; and here the two wagon outfits parted.

"I'll see you on the ranch, Terry," promised George. "We'll be only five or ten miles from you, pop says. Wait for me before you go hunting much."

"I will," engaged Terry. "Good-by. Good-by Virgie."

"Good-by."

And with parting waves the two wagons separated. The Stantons followed the main road southward, for the Kansas River, and for Fort Riley on west; the Richards' wagon turned to the north, more, and launched straight across the trackless prairie, through the valley of the Big Blue.

This seemed to Terry more like it—more like being a real western pioneer. Here they were, with their wagon, traveling all alone, making their own trail, just as if they were the first white people into the country. The sun was bright and glowing, the prairie was green and in places carpeted with bright flowers, a little breeze blew gently, Mr. Richards dried off and so did the wagon and oxen; and best of all, soon after crossing Wildcat Creek they all would be "home" where Mrs. Richards could start in making pie on her stove in the new cabin.

It was after noon when they came in sight of Wildcat Creek—at least, in sight of the willows and cottonwoods which fringed it.

"I wish I was as sure of this ford as I was of the

other," quoth Terry's father, calling to Mrs. Richards. "It was all right, the last time I tried it."

"Where is it?"

"Head for that big cottonwood, Terry," directed his father. "You'll find a wagon-track there, if I'm not mistaken, where I brought in a load of stuff when I built the cabin."

He loped on, to reconnoiter as before. Halted, he beckoned for Terry to come along.

"Goodness, but that doesn't look very inviting, does it!" commented Terry's mother, peering in doubt.

This was the ford, evidently; an old wagon track led into the water, and out again on the other side. But the creek seemed high. It had spread beyond its usual limits, and was coursing by, heavy with mud and as thick as a paste. Terry figured that he could throw a stone across it, all right; but the wagon wasn't a stone.

"Hadn't we better wait, Ralph?" proposed Terry's mother, dubiously. "It will go down again. I don't like the looks of it. Do you?"

"It looks worse than it is. But I'll ride in a way, and find out."

So in he urged the old mare. She, too, seemed afraid, and trod very gingerly, snorting at the new adventure. However, the water did not rise so high against her as had the water in the Big Blue; and from the middle Mr. Richards called back cheerily.

"We can make it. Get aboard, Terry, and drive. Wait till I put the rope on, again, so as to hold you steady."

Terry drove into position. He ordered Shep into the wagon, and climbed to the seat once more. His father hoisted the chicken coop higher. Shep, his fore feet on the coop, stood gazing out expectantly.

"Head so as to land in those other tracks, Terry," bade his father. "I'll stay you with the rope."

This looked easy; nothing as compared with the Big Blue, where they had to double up. Terry drove in confidently; but several times he felt the wagon lurch under him and settle by the side, as if the bottom were softer than they had figured. Probably there were spots of mud or quicksand. The heavy water hit the wagon box hard, and the wagon swayed and trembled.

"Oh, Terry!" implored his mother, when now the wheels on the up side sank into a hole and the wagon careened dangerously. The oxen were almost carried off their feet.

"Keep going, Terry!" shouted his father. "Don't stop. Use the whip."

"Buck! Spot! Hep! Haw! Haw, Buck! Hep with you!" cried Terry, and swept the span with his lash.

They tugged nobly, did Buck and Spot. The wagon stuck—careened—creaked alarming—the water poured in—Buck slipped and momentarily disappeared, but came up again; and suddenly, just as the wagon moved again——

"Terry! Watch out!" exclaimed his mother.

Terry glanced up-stream; floating sluggishly, and slowly whirling over and over, a large snag, part of a half-drowned tree, was bearing down for them. One

end was going to strike them, sure, unless he pulled on.

He yelled loudly to the struggling, blowing oxen, and desperately laid the lash on, thwacking their tense backs. Well they responded, good old Buck and Spot, as if they knew the danger. The wagon forged ahead; but after all, the end of the tree struck it at the rear.

With a grinding sound it lodged there, swinging the wagon down-stream while the current boiled and eddied.

"Whang!" snapped the rope, broken in the middle. Terry's mother screamed and clutched at him, he heard a great shout from his father, and away went the wagon, dragging the oxen backward as it slewed and tilted.

Terry must act hard and quick. He knew that his father was riding for them as fast as he could; but the oxen were off their feet, and like the wagon were adrift, towed by the floating snag. If only they might pull free! He shouted his best, did Terry, trying to swing the half strangled team down and across stream. His great fear was that the wagon would be capsized, and throw his mother out. Then, just at the moment of nip and tuck, when he was almost sliding from the seat, himself, the wagon grounded—so did the oxen—and there was a sense of freedom as if the snag had torn loose and left them.

"Now! Buck! Yip with you! Spot! Gee! Gee, Spot! Whoa! Gee! Yip! Yip!" And Terry, shouting and urging, plied the lash.

Buck and Spot tugged; on moved the wagon, toward

a low place in the bank several rods below the right landing; but that didn't matter, so long as the oxen could make it. Terry's mother cried out again, with her head turned.

"Oh, Terry! Your father!"

On, to the bank, lunged the bulging-eyed oxen—reached it at last and through the soft mud yanked the wagon to the top, where they stopped of their own accord, to stand with flanks heaving.

Terry now might look behind him, for his father. But his father was not in sight, neither was the mare or her colt.

"Run, Terry! Down the bank!" besought his mother. "He'll need help." She sprang to the ground, but Terry was out first.

CHAPTER IV,

THE NEW HOME

QUICK though his mother was, quick was Terry; and at full speed he ran, down the bank of the creek and around the turn below. Shep loyally followed, excited also. From the turn the creek flowed swiftly on, in numerous other turns, some of them banked by willows and other brush and trees. Constantly peering, Terry panted along; and occasionally he shouted. He must have gone about a mile, without success, when suddenly he saw the mare, and her colt. They were grazing on his side of the creek; and at the approach of him, breathless, they pricked their ears and whinnied. The mare was wringing wet, saddle and all. The colt had a deep scratch in his shoulder, as if a snag had scraped him. But of Terry's father there was not a token, anywhere; not on the prairie, and not on the banks; and not (Terry was glad of this, at least) in the water.

Terry searched feverishly, everywhere that he could think of.

"What did you do with my father?" he even demanded, in despair, of the old mare. She did not answer, except with a little nicker which he could not translate; and when, sobbing, he mounted her and turned back for the wagon, to report to his mother, the

colt ambled in his trail. If they could only talk in language that he might understand!

Panting back again, when he rounded the turn beyond which was the wagon his heart gave a leap, for he saw, at the wagon, and talking with his mother, a man, horseback. But it was not his father. No, not his father, miraculously mounted upon another horse. The man appeared quite different. He was a long-haired, full-bearded man—a light brown beard. He wore a peak-crowned, wide-brimmed black hat, with a filagree band, a loose white soft shirt, black trousers flaring at the bottom, with a broad gilt stripe down the seam; on his hands embroidered gauntlet gloves, and on his high-heeled boots (into which his trousers were *not* tucked), enormous spurs.

"Did you find him, Terry?" called his mother, eagerly.

Terry shook his head.

"I found the old mare and her colt. They were eating grass, where they'd come across. But I couldn't find him *anywhere*."

"Oh, Terry!" gasped his mother, imploringly.

"How far did you look?" queried the stranger, viewing Terry with earnest blue eyes.

"About a mile down. Then I came back to tell my mother."

"You wait here a bit. I'll ride further and see what there is," proffered the stranger; and wheeling his horse, he loped briskly away down the creek.

"Did you look on both banks, Terry?" quavered his mother.

Terry nodded.

"Everywhere," he said. "He wasn't in sight."

"He may have been carried on down," spoke his mother, hopefully. "He must have been swept out of the saddle by the snag."

"The colt's scratched. See?" responded Terry, hoping too. "Maybe that man will find him. Who is that man?"

"I don't really know. He rode up to me while I was waiting, and asked what was the trouble. He seemed to know where the Richards' cabin is. I told him who we were."

There wasn't much to do but wait—and that was dreary work. Terry continued to sit in the saddle. He let the mare graze. Shep whined, as if aware that something was wrong. The sun shone bright, the little breeze blew across the green, flowery prairie, but what a change had occurred! Almost within sight of the new home, when the long journey was practically at an end, and they three were so happy, this disaster had interfered, to take the comrade whom they so loved and on whom they so depended.

The wet wagon dripped, the two oxen stood with noses drooped, Shep whined, and Terry, seeing his mother fixed and white and gazing down the course of the creek, felt like bursting into tears. But he must not; he must not, or she would cry, too. He must play the man, and be ready to do whatever he could, to help her.

It seemed a long time before the stranger horseman reappeared, galloping back up the creek. As he arrived, he shook his head—but he might have come with worse

news than that he had found nothing. There was still hope, then.

"I searched two miles, and found never a sign," he reported. "Sorry, but that's the case. I don't think much more can be done at present, but I'll do whatever I can."

"Oh, Terry!" cried his mother, piteously. "What will *we* do! I can't believe that your father is *gone*."

"I wouldn't believe so, either, if I were you, ma'am," spoke the stranger. "You aren't left alone, at any rate. You've got this boy to stand by you, and be the man of the family."

"He will. I know he will," quavered Mrs. Richards. "Won't you, Terry?"

Terry nodded, choking. He sprang from the mare and running to his mother put his arm around her shoulders.

"And we won't give up the ranch," he said. "I can work it. And we'll have it all ready for dad when he comes."

"That's right," approved the stranger, heartily. "That's the brave lad and that's the brave woman. Now if I were you I'd go ahead to your cabin, and not wait around here any longer. I'll ride the creek again and keep watch; and after that I'll come up and see what more I can do. But you'd better take your mother on, Terry my lad, and put a roof over her, and wait *there*. Can you drive those oxen?"

"Of course," asserted Terry. "Can't I, ma!"

"Just as well as anybody," affirmed his mother, proudly, with a hug. She cast another long, searching

look down the creek. "Yes," she said, with a sad little smile at Terry, "we'd better go on. Terry'll take care of me, I know. He'll be my man until his father comes back. We ought to get to the cabin before dark."

"Bueno," approved the stranger, with a Spanish word. "Why, when I was a boy of his age I was ready to take care of my mother, and I reckon he's every bit as good as I was. Get aboard. The mare will follow. Lucky you've got her. She and the colt'll come in handy. I know something about horses. I've been out in Californy, where nobody walked. Well, I'll tell you how to reach your cabin, if it's the Richards' cabin. I've passed it several times, of late. You see yon hill?" he asked, of Terry. Terry did. "Keep to the left of it, and on the other side you'll sight this creek again. The cabin's only about a mile straight ahead, then, to the south of a patch of timber, before you reach the creek. How are you fixed for supplies?"

"Plenty," answered Mrs. Richards.

"All right. Do the best you can, and depend on the boy; and when I've ridden the creek, and notified some people below to keep a lookout, I'll come up and see how you're getting on, and report anything that I've learned."

"Thank you again and again," said Mrs. Richards, as she entered the wagon once more. "Will you tell us your name, so we'll know who you are?"

The man laughed bluffly.

"Oh, names don't amount to much, out in this country, ma'am. It's what people do, more than what

name they happen to bear. But if you want to know, my name's Judy, and mostly Sol. Sol Judy."

"Do you live here?"

"No, ma'am, except that I live nowhere and everywhere. I live as I happen to be. I've been in Californy, until lately. That's where I got this horse. I've been sailor and soldier and miner and teamster and now I'm a horse breaker, sort of. I'm making a business of corralling horses from the Injuns or wild on the prairie, and breaking 'em and selling 'em. I just ride through the country, which is why I'm here."

He sidled his horse (which certainly was a fine animal, whose big saddle, with high pommel and cantle and great hooded stirrups, looked like California, as now did its rider's costume also) to the wagon, and reaching out shook hands with Terry's mother.

"You've got the boy," he reminded. "He'll pull you through. And you've got a good ranch, 'cording to my notion. Keep a stiff upper lip—if you'll pardon my saying so. As for you, my lad," he continued, now extending his hand to Terry, "you buckle to it and make a home for your mother. If I can do anything for you, while I'm in the country I will. I'll be down at Riley, off and on. That's my headquarters. But I'll come up soon, anyhow. Adios, and good luck."

He gripped Terry's hand hard, and slapped him on the shoulder.

"I will," assured Terry. "Please look a little more, though, and find my father."

"We'll find him," declared Sol Judy, with stubborn shake of his high-crowned hat. "He may have been

carried several miles down, yet, and crawled out, and is getting his breath so he can travel. Good-by."

"Good-by," they replied. And Terry manfully shouted, to the oxen: "Buck! Spot! Haw! Giddap! Hep with you."

Buck and Spot started, the wagon creaked and rolled ahead, and watching the march, a moment, sitting his fine horse Mr. Judy waved encouragement. They waved back. Then he turned, and cantered away, down along the creek.

"Well, Terry, we must do the best we can till your father comes," said Terry's mother.

"Do you think he'll come, ma?" anxiously asked Terry.

"I know he will, dear. I'm as certain of it as I am that I see you. Meanwhile, you're the man of the family. You'll have to work hard, but I'll help you."

"You needn't do a thing, ma," declared Terry. "I'll do it all—except make pie. Gwan, Buck!"

"We've got the chickens and the oxen and the horses," pursued his mother, bravely, "and we might be much worse off; mightn't we?"

"I should say so," agreed Terry. "Haw, Spot! What's the matter with you! Haw—now gee! Hep! Gwan."

"Mr. Judy told us to keep to the left of that hill, remember. Then the cabin's only a little way further."

"I know. Wonder when we'll see it."

"Pretty soon, dear."

They plodded along, and the hill drew nearer. Slowly they rounded the base of it, and entered into

a valley. They gazed anxiously ahead, for the sun was low and evening was at hand, and they dreaded to camp again, by themselves this time.

"I see it! I see it!" exclaimed Terry's mother, from the wagon seat. "Anyway, I see a cabin."

"Where?" And Terry craned his neck.

"Yonder, up the valley. There's the creek, isn't it? That line of brush. And there's a timber patch. Don't you see the cabin, too?"

Terry did: a low cabin, set out on the bottom-land not far from the creek and the timber patch.

"It's our ranch, ma," he cried. "I know it. It looks just like dad told us it would."

"I wish he were here," breathed his mother, softly; she gazed behind them, again, hoping Mr. Judy might be bringing him; but not a moving figure was in sight. And not a moving figure was in sight before, either. Very lonely appeared the landscape, where the single cabin was the only token of human life, until Terry said, exultantly:

"Here are wagon tracks, ma. I guess we'll follow them. They must be the ones dad made when he hauled building stuff across the creek. We can pretend he's leading us!"

"So we can, Terry," agreed his mother.

Trending toward the cabin, on wended the tracks, with Terry fitting the wagon wheels to them, and Buck and Spot pulling a little more lively, as if they, also, anticipated soon being "home." The cabin rose against the horizon, where hung the low sun. The breeze had ceased blowing, and everything was quiet.

Terry stared expectantly, sizing up the situation; so did his mother.

The cabin grew plainer. It resolved into a plain log cabin, almost square, with a sod roof, and in the gable end of the roof a small window, above the door, showing that this was a cabin with a loft. The cabin sat right out in the open, as if it might have been dropped from the sky or from a passing wagon, and the sod extended to the very threshold. But there was a rude shed, for the wagon, and adjacent to it a pole corral or cow-yard, enclosing a sort of lean-to, for the oxen and horses.

Terry gazed hard at the chimney, hoping against hope that his father might have someway beat them and have started a fire as a welcome. Smoke coming out of that chimney would have been a grand sight. However, there was no smoke, the door and the window-shutters were closed tight, and the cabin evidently was still waiting for its family.

"It looks like a real cabin, doesn't it!" asserted Terry's mother. "You may be sure it's good, if your father made it. But there aren't many neighbors."

"We'll have the Stantons, pretty soon," comforted Terry. "You mustn't be afraid, ma. I'll take care of you. I'll use dad's gun and shoot game for you and keep the Injuns off. Whoa, Buck! Spot!" And at last he halted the oxen, before the cabin door.

"Anyway, here we are, laddie," assured his mother, plucking up courage, and springing down. "It must be our cabin, don't you think? But how'll we get in? Everything's locked. Your father told you how, didn't he? By a window."

"Sure," said Terry, boldly. "It's easy. I'll show you."

"Be careful," she begged. "If it shouldn't be our cabin——"

"But it is, ma," argued Terry. "If it isn't I won't be able to break in. See?"

He opened his knife, and walked boldly to the side window on the right. His father had explained that the middle board of the shutter was only tacked lightly in place, and that the way to do was to pry it out with a knife blade, and then one could insert an arm far enough to lift out the wooden staple that held the shutter fast.

Terry applied his knife-blade; and, hurrah, out came the board.

"I've got it, ma!" he cried. "Wait till I open the door."

He pulled the pin which fitted down through the bottom rail of the shutter and into the sill, and swung the shutter outward. In he clambered—peering about him, as he did so, to make certain.

The interior of the cabin was dim, but smelled new and sweet. As he lightly landed on the wooden floor he heard a slight scuffle, as if he had surprised another occupant; but he did not stop for that. Across the boards he ran, to open the door at once. The door was fastened shut by a bar which laid in a socket of the door and of the jamb. It took only a second to lift this also, and the wooden latch (the latchstring of which was hanging inside), and fling the door wide.

"Come in, Mrs. Richards, ma'am," he invited,

with a mock bow. "Make yourself at home. Will you stay to supper?"

"I declare!" quoth his mother, nervously holding back her skirts, and standing on the threshold, to survey. "It seems quite nice. I do wish *he* were here."

And so did Terry.

She put her arm around him, and together they inspected the new quarters, as she cautiously entered, with him. The interior of the cabin of course was rudely furnished, but it did strike them as "homey". There was a fine big fire-place, of stones cemented with clay, and a hole in the upper part of the chimney, for the stovepipe. Terry remembered how his father had counted on this fire-place for comfort. There was a table, of long slabs, dressed-sides up, on stout square legs. There was a slab stool for his mother to sit on when cooking or paring potatoes. There was a bench, too, which in summer would be outside, for the wash basin, etc. There was a ladder, leading to a trap-door in the ceiling, for Terry to ascend when he went to bed "up-stairs." There was a broad bunk, or bed, at the far end of the cabin, built of planks, like a shallow box, to be fitted with the mattress that his mother had made to measurement; here his mother and father were to sleep. There was the barrel, which should stand outside, covered, to be kept full of water for daily use. There were three windows, one on either side and one at the end opposite the door; the sashes for these were in the wagon. The floor was of rough new planks, hauled from the mill; and while they did not meet exactly and left cracks, they made a stout floor.

Similar planks formed the ceiling, but whitish muslin had been tacked over them, to keep the dust from sifting down. Terry nimbly ran up the ladder and poked his head through the trap door hole.

"I've got a bunk up here, ma," he called, excited. "You won't be afraid, with me right over your head, will you! I bet I can see the whole country from the window. Do you want to come up?"

"Not now, Terry," she answered. "We'd better move some things in from the wagon, before dark."

Down jumped Terry, and out they went again. But they could not resist one little tour of the premises. The cabin appeared remarkably sturdy, proof against wind and weather—yes, and against "Injuns." The logs, from which the bark had been peeled, were chinked tight and hard with clay. The chimney was tremendously thick, and the sod roof already was growing grass! The shed was plenty large enough for the wagon and machinery; and one side contained a roost for the chickens. The corral was strong, too, and the shed was water-proof, and there was a rack for hay. There even was an outside cellar, or dugout, with the dirt roof only a couple of feet above the surface of the ground, and here would be kept the butter and milk and potatoes and that sort of thing. And, valuable in the present emergency, against one side of the cabin was stacked a lot of split wood, waiting for the stove!

Well, well, matters might have been much worse, thanks to Mr. Richards, who plainly had worked hard. What a lot he had accomplished, to make the new home pleasant and convenient!

However, as Terry's mother had reminded him, it was high time that they set about moving in. Terry manfully turned the oxen out, to graze, and tethered the old mare to the corral until he had started his mother at housekeeping.

The first thing to do was to put up the stove. That was quite a job, for the stove was heavy, and at the bottom of the load. Finally they got to it, after they had carried in chairs and the mattress and a lot of other stuff; and tugging manfully Terry dragged it to the rear end of the wagon. When they had stripped it as much as it could be stripped, they managed to drop it out, and foot by foot tugged it inside the cabin, to the spot that his mother had selected after they had measured the pipe lengths. Then they set it up, and reaching on the stool Terry adjusted the pipe.

"There!" said his mother, triumphantly standing back and surveying it. "We sha'n't have pie to-night, but maybe we will to-morrow."

They made the beds—Terry's up in the loft, his mother's below, and they rapidly distributed the furniture and the cooking utensils. Really, in an astonishingly short space of time the cabin began to look very familiar.

The sun had sunk, twilight was flowing across the lonely wide valley. From the doorway Terry's mother suddenly exclaimed, pointing.

"Terry! Look! See those big birds flying into that timber!"

"Oh, ma! They're turkeys! Wild turkeys! That's where they roost."

"I shouldn't wonder a bit. Think of having a turkey roost in one's own yard."

"I'll go get one if you say so," proffered Terry, excited at the prospect. "I'll take the shot-gun."

"No, not to-night," bade his mother. "You've got to water the mare and put her up, you know; and we've enough to eat, for supper."

"Well, sometime, just the same," answered Terry. But she was right. Business before pleasure, at present.

"And get me a pail of water, too, dear, while you're watering the mare," added his mother.

Taking the pail, and leading the mare, Terry started away, for the creek, over whose brush hung low the dusk. He had trudged only about a dozen paces, when his mother's voice summoned him alarmingly.

"Oh, Terry! Terry! Come quick!"

Dropping pail and rope, back ran Terry, frightened at the tone. His mother was outside, her skirts again held tight, while she peered in; and he heard a shrill, angry buzz, rising and falling, rising and falling, making the very air quiver.

"A rattlesnake, Terry! It came up right through the floor beside me!" gasped his mother, pointing.

She had lighted a candle. There, near the table, was sticking up through a knothole in the floor a rattlesnake, sure enough. His rattle was out of sight, under the floor; but half of him formed a couple of coils on top, where his ugly head, protruding from the center of his coils, swayed and darted its forked tongue. Evidently he was angered at the invasion,



"LOOK OUT, TERRY!" BESOUGHT HIS MOTHER.

and the noise of feet over him, and he had issued to give warning.

"I'll fix *him*, ma," asserted Terry. "Just let him wait a minute." And Terry sprang for his ox whip.

"Be careful, Terry!" begged his mother. "Don't go near. Throw things at him and when he's under again we'll stop up the hole."

"Shucks!" objected Terry. "We can't live in any peace, with him under the floor. He's liable to dig out, or something."

Terry advanced with the whip; but he advanced very cautiously. Louder and more angry sounded the rattle, and the snake showed no disposition to retreat.

"Look out, Terry!" besought his mother.

"He can't jump far, out of that hole," declared Terry. He poised the whip-stock, and within striking distance swung it mightily. The butt landed full against the snake's head, and must have broken the neck, for the snake sprawled lax and quivering. Terry leaped for him and thwacked him hard, battering the head to jelly. Then he bethought himself of the pitchfork; ran and got it, picked the snake from the hole, and (his mother standing aside fearfully) pitched it outside.

"Jiminy! He's a sockdologer, isn't he, ma!" crowed Terry. "Think of having him in the family!" For the snake was fully five feet long, as thick through as one's forearm, and by count had thirteen rattles and a button. "Give me something and I'll stuff that hole up; and to-night I'll nail a tin over it. Wonder if there are any more holes."

But there weren't; having stuffed the hole, Terry laid the snake body apart for skinning in the morning, and proceeded to the creek. He felt as though he had done pretty well, for a beginning.

CHAPTER V

AN ALARM IN THE NIGHT

DOWN by the creek all was chill and gloomy, with strange shadows lurking among the willows, and the water babbling in many voices. The old mare snorted and stared suspiciously, before she drank. Terry had almost to drag her forward to the brink. He felt a little uneasy, himself; for this was strange ground, the real wilderness, and the cabin light, shining through the door ajar, seemed far away.

However, he decided that he probably would have to do considerable tramping around, at this hour, hereafter, and that he might as well start right in. He was the man of the family. His father of course wouldn't have been afraid at all. Oh, if dad would only turn up safe and sound, or even a little injured; how glad they would be to see him!

The mare certainly acted very foolish, for an old horse who had camped out in the open every night for weeks. While drinking, she frequently paused, to snort, and stare, and paw, and the colt sidled close to her, pressing against her shoulder. Terry also stared. He rather wished that he had brought the gun, although he could not see a thing to be alarmed at.

Darkness was gathering rapidly, enfolding the stream bed and the timber patch. Hist! There were the turkeys, talking—piping querulously one to another. A great owl, on silent wing, flapped over; and night-hawks, scarcely seen, swooped up and down. Suddenly, in the timber, sounded a rush, a crash, and a tremendous fluttering from the disturbed turkeys. The old mare wheeled, snorting again, and Terry himself made a long jump, holding to her rope. The turkeys were twittering excitedly, and blundering from branch to branch. What ailed them? Perhaps one had fallen out of bed. Terry's heart thumped, as he tried to listen. Well, whatever it was that had disturbed the turkeys, at any rate the old mare wanted to go back to the cabin, and he was willing to take her. He must confess that he did not like to be so near this timber patch until he got more used to it by day-time.

So back he trudged, the mare keeping abreast of him at a short nervous trot; and he cast occasional glances behind him to make certain that nothing was following them. Glad enough was he to be guided by the cabin light, and to know that his mother was waiting for him. The fume of the wood burning in the stove smelled good; it smelled of home.

"Is that you, Terry?" called his mother, opening the door wider, and standing framed there, looking out, as he approached.

"Whoo-ee!" responded Terry. "I'm here. I'll set the pail of water inside and then I'll come myself after I've put the mare up."

"Yes, do, dear. It's getting too dark for you. And please bring another armful of wood with you."

He delivered the pail of water and turned the mare and her colt into the corral. Then he got the armful of wood, and his first evening's chores at the new home were done.

"All right, Terry. This is cosy, isn't it!" cheerily said his mother, busy at the stove. And she spoke truth. But what a lot she had done even in his short absence. She was smart, was his mother. She had arranged the scant furniture, and had strung a bright calico curtain so as to shut off her bedroom, and had set the table, and now by the light of two candles was cooking supper—bacon and fried potatoes and biscuit!

"No more snakes?" queried Terry.

"Not a sign of one. You can wash, and we'll eat. Supper's about ready."

"So am I," informed Terry.

They were just sitting down, when a loud hail of "Hello, in there!" broke upon their talk.

"Oh, Terry!" exclaimed his mother, hopefully—for although they had tried to talk of many things, their minds had been full of the one subject: Terry's father. Now perhaps he had come.

"Hello!" shouted Terry; and jumping to the door, he opened it.

But only Sol Judy sat, on his horse, revealed by the light. Still, he was welcome, for he might have brought news.

"Already settled, are you?" he greeted, as he dismounted, and dropped his lines.

"Yes, sir. Pretty near," answered Terry. "Did you find anything?"

"Is that Mr. Judy?" called Mrs. Richards. "Have him come in."

"I can't stay," said Mr. Judy. "I rode up here because I knew you'd be anxious." He advanced to the threshold, and spoke directly, without any beating around the bush. "I have both bad news and good. I haven't found your husband, I'm sorry to say; but I've found this hat. Is it his?" And he held out a hat.

"That's his!" exclaimed Terry. "I know it is, ma. There's the tear in the crown. Remember?"

"It's his hat," agreed Mrs. Richards; and her voice broke, as she fingered the bedraggled brim. "Where did you find it, please?"

"Not in the water, ma'am," quickly answered Mr. Judy. "That's the curious part, and that's the good news. It was hanging on some willows, several feet above the water, at the edge of the creek. It couldn't have got there without being carried by somebody or something. But I searched high and low for the man himself, and found never a trace, except the hat."

"Couldn't it have dropped from the horse?" proposed Terry's mother. "It might have caught on the saddle."

"It was hanging too high for that, ma'am. And anyway, it was on the opposite side of the creek from where the horse came out. I found the mare's tracks, where she left the water, which was nowhere near the hat."

"Weren't there any tracks at all near the hat?" ventured Terry.

"Not a one. Most of the willows were standing

in water, and I did think the water might have been stirred up a little, but I can't be sure. But I've an idea your husband's alive, ma'am. I can't tell why, except the hat seems to say so."

"I know he's alive," said Mrs. Richards, simply. "I know he's alive and I know he'll come back sometime, and all will be explained. I do hope he's not lying out in the creek, injured. That worries me more than anything else."

Mr. Judy shook his head.

"It doesn't seem likely, considering the hat. He'd have strength enough to call out; and I searched the whole creek thoroughly. It isn't deep enough to drown in, in many places. There's a long stretch of shallows, below. The creek's fallen two feet, since noon. It's almost normal now."

"But not fallen enough to have left the hat so high, you think?" asked Mrs. Richards.

"Well, I should say not; it never was up to that point, ma'am."

"We'll hang the hat in the cabin, and it will be ready for him when he comes," announced Terry's mother. "Won't we, Terry?"

Terry nodded, a lump in his throat. Just a hat was rather forlorn. Still, it would be something to look at, and it would seem like a sort of protection; and when his father turned up (as he surely would, wouldn't he?) they could hand it to him and say:

"Here's your hat, father. It's been waiting for you."

"Now you must have a bite of supper, sir," con-

tinued Mrs. Richards, to Sol Judy. "Come in and sit down; there's a-plenty, such as it is. I put it together in a hurry."

But Terry felt that his mother needn't apologize for that supper!

"I'd like to mighty well, ma'am," answered Mr. Judy, hesitating. "I see biscuits, and hot bread always was my weak point. But I've a long ride to take yet to-night, so as to do a little business to-morrow. So now that I've told you what I know, I'll light out. But I'll be 'round again and see how you and the boy are getting on."

"Wait just a minute," bade Terry's mother. "Pour a cup of coffee, Terry, and he can be drinking it." And she fled to the table, opened half a dozen biscuits, thrust bacon in, stuffed them into a paper sack and passed it into Mr. Judy's hands.

"You can eat while you ride," she informed. "Nobody shall come to this cabin door at meal time and go away without *something*. Besides, you've taken a great deal of trouble on our account."

"Nothing at all, ma'am," stammered Mr. Judy, embarrassed by the biscuits and thanks. "Everybody must help everybody else, in a new country. I wish I could have brought you better news; but you can keep hoping."

"We're more than hoping; we're expecting," replied Terry's mother.

"Maybe next time you come, you'll find dad here," added Terry.

"Shouldn't wonder a mite," responded Mr. Judy,

putting foot into stirrup. "Good-night to you and good luck, and much obliged for the forage. These biscuits atop that coffee will carry me a long way."

"Good-night," they called. "And thanks for your trouble."

As he rode off, he bit into a biscuit. Then he disappeared in the darkness.

"We'll hang the hat on that peg beside the door, Terry," quoth his mother. So she did. "And we'll talk of him just as though he was around somewhere, and would walk in at any moment. There's no use in speculating exactly *where* he is, or imagining unpleasant things, which may not be true. I think he's wandered off, and will be picked up and returned to us; and meanwhile we'll do the very best we can."

"All right," agreed Terry; for he could see that his mother was trying hard to be brave, and to make him brave, also.

Anyway, it was comforting to have the hat hanging on the peg, and the biscuits were particularly good, and the cabin was the real thing; so affairs might have been much worse.

"Let's see; what will we do to-morrow, Terry?" invited his mother as he wiped the dishes while she washed. "About the first thing, is to be sure that we'll have plenty to eat. I guess we'll make a kitchen garden, and have it growing. And we must be getting ready for winter, too, so that the animals won't starve. We ought to plant some corn. And your father spoke of a bottom of wild hay, didn't he? We must look at that. And a pasture for the oxen and horses ought

to be fenced. And we must invent some way of getting water easier. Maybe the spring is handy enough, but I haven't seen it yet, have you? And there's the wood supply to keep up, and I don't know what we're going to do away out here for milk and butter, and—and—oh, Terry! How can we ever manage to live, alone?"

With that, his mother suddenly held her apron against her face and began to cry.

This was awful! Terry would much have preferred to cry, himself. But now of course he couldn't, for he must comfort her. After he had reminded her again and again that he was to be her "man," and that everything was going to turn out all right, she hastily wiped her eyes, and smiled, and declared that she wouldn't be "foolish" any more.

They went to bed early: his mother behind the curtain, at the end of the cabin, Terry in his loft, while Shep kept guard outside and had the shed for a shelter and the chickens for company.

Terry liked it, up in the loft, which extended the full length and width of the cabin. In the middle, under the peak of the roof, he could stand up, but the slope of the roof came clear to the floor, at the eaves. Above him were the roof beams and ridge-pole and a dense thatch of willow boughs upon which had been packed the clay mud and sod, two feet thick. Considerable dust and large particles of dirt had sifted down into the loft, but Terry did not mind this.

Under the window in the end was his bunk; he opened the shutter and fastened it back with the wooden

button, and hopped in beneath the blanket and quilts. Lying there, he could stare up at the million stars, while the cool air swept across his face. Everything was still; all the world seemed asleep. He was just drifting off into slumber, himself, when he was startled wide awake and a-tremble by the most uncanny, blood-curdling noise that he had ever heard. It was a long, weird yell, rising high and falling again, long drawn-out, piercing the night like a knife. Whether it was near or far he could not tell, but evidently it was some animal. Jiminy Christmas! What? Sounded a little like a horse yelling, the way horses can, when angry or distressed.

But it wasn't the mare; for when he hastily sat up, peering, he heard her snorting in the corral; Shep was barking furiously, the chickens were cackling afrightedly, and his mother's voice called:

"Terry! Are you awake? Did you hear that?"

"Yes; it waked me up. Do you want me, ma? Are you afraid?"

"No; we're all right, in here, I guess. But what was it?"

"I don't know."

"Is the shed door shut?"

"I don't think so; I left it open for Shep."

"Maybe we'd better shut it, if there's some animal prowling around. I'll go and shut it."

Terry tumbled out and felt for his boots.

"No, you mustn't, ma," he cried. "I'll shut it. I'd just as lief."

"I hate to have you, Terry. You won't be afraid,

will you? And you'll be careful. I'll hold a candle for you. You can take the gun if you want to. Shep can sleep under the wagon, can't he. We wouldn't like to lose our chickens."

"I'll go," repeated Terry.

He hauled on his boots, and crept for the trap-door and the ladder. As he set foot on the top round, the cry sounded again—that wailing, hideous cry amidst the stillness and the night. Now Shep was pressed against the cabin door, barking and growling but ready to come in. He, too, was dubious—and it was not often that Shep backed from any danger.

With a wrapper on, and her hair down, Terry's mother was waiting, a lighted candle in her hand.

"Dear, I do hate to have you go out," she faltered, anxiously. "Take the gun, and be very careful."

Terry grabbed the gun, where it was leaning in a corner. He opened the door, and with his mother close behind him, candle lifted, he stared out. Shep was mighty glad to have him, and now darted forward a little way, barking and growling. He may have seen something, but Terry could see not a thing. Well, he was in for it now; and with a "Sick 'em, Shep!" and a bold heart he stepped forth.

The shed was around the corner of the house; his mother followed him that far, to the corner, holding the candle for him. Its beams were feeble, scarcely reaching to the shed and corral. The canvas hood of the wagon glimmered spectral in the chill, dark air; and beyond, outside the circle of candle-light, what lurked? Terry's feet carried him forward, but his

heart beat so fast that he could scarcely breathe. It took all his spunk, to cross the haunted space, even though Shep formed the advance. However, his mother would have gone—and that made him ashamed to show the white feather.

Glaring right and left, he trudged ahead, his finger upon the trigger of the heavy gun. Hurrah, he had reached the shed at last, and it didn't take him long to close that door and fasten it with the thong and wooden staple. The old mare was barely visible, her head inquiringly stretched over the top pole of the corral, as near to him as she could get. She nickered at him appealingly. He stepped and patted her nose. Why, she was trembling all over! Shep was still growling, but his growls were mingled with frightened whimpers. Terry peered across the corral—and there, at the other side, he actually saw two pale spots, about three feet from the ground and about six inches apart. Eyes! Wild animal eyes!

Terry's heart gave a tremendous thump, he caught his breath, but up to his shoulder leaped the gun, and almost before its butt touched him he had blazed away—bang! He didn't take time to aim; but by the flare he was certain that he glimpsed a long body turn and in a single bound disappear.

"Terry!" called his mother, frantically. "What's the matter? Are you all right? Terry!"

"I'm all right, ma," answered Terry, excited. "Something was out here at the corral."

"Did you shoot it?"

"I don't believe so." He ran around the corral,

with his second barrel ready. "No, 'm. 'Tisn't here. I'm going to shoot again, though, to scare it." And "Bang!" went his second barrel.

Shep had darted forward, at the first shot. Now back he came, whining, his bristles high but his tail between his legs. Whatever he had pursued, he had gone quite near enough to, evidently.

"Come in, Terry. Won't you, please?" besought Terry's mother.

"Yes, 'm. It's gone, anyhow."

Feeling rather satisfied with himself, Terry strode for the house. He stopped at the wagon and invited Shep into it—a shelter which Shep somehow was not loth to accept, instead of the exposed ground underneath. He curled himself away, growling.

"What do you suppose that was?" asked Terry's mother, lighting Terry into the house again.

"I don't know, ma," said Terry. "But it was big and had everything scared stiff. I guess it was what yelled and woke us up."

"Well, I don't like such animals prowling around," confessed his mother.

"I'm not afraid any more, now," asserted Terry. And he wasn't. He was over the worst. "Whatever it is, it had better keep away from our place."

CHAPTER VI

TERRY MEETS THE ENEMY

THE beast did not scream again; at least, they did not hear it, and the morning dawned bright and peaceful. Terry awakened to the voice of his mother calling up the ladder way. As he dressed in a jiffy he could smell the aroma of breakfast cooking. Through the open window of his loft the sun streamed; and looking out while he pulled on his boots he could see the green of brush and meadow stretching away, to the creek and the timber patch. And it all belonged to them—to his father and mother and him!

Well, there was lots to be done, but it would be fun to work for oneself and carve a home out of the wilderness. Already the chickens were anxious to be up and at it, for they were complaining as the shafts of light struck through the cracks in the shed. Buck and Spot were in sight, industriously grazing.

Terry hustled down the ladder, exchanged a brisk good-morning and a sound kiss with his mother; and grabbing the hand-basin stepped outside to wash. Shep came bounding to him, for greeting, and in the corral the old mare and her colt, waiting for breakfast, were safe and sound also. The beast visitor of the night might have been only a dream.

After washing, Terry made a bee-line for the corral,

to search the spot at which he had pointed the gun. He had shot too high, that was certain; for the bottom edge of the load had barely scraped the top rail. So there were no blood marks—but in the soft ground below there were paw tracks. Yes, sir. Why, the beast had worn almost a little path, as if he had trotted back and forth along the bottom rail! Jiminy! No wonder the old mare was frightened, with that thing stalking her and her colt, in the darkness. Terry felt a little shaky merely at the tracks; sniffing at them, Shep dropped his bushy tail and growled.

Plainly enough, no common prowler was this; no wolf or coyote. But before Terry had finished examining, his mother called him to breakfast.

"Terry? Breakfast. Where are you, dear?"

"I'm coming," answered Terry. He let the chickens out, and hurried back.

"I saw where that animal was," he announced, breathless. "It left a regular path where it walked up and down outside the corral. I didn't hit it, though. I shot too high."

"Oh, Terry!" gasped his mother. "What kind of tracks. Not bear?"

"Don't think so. They're big round tracks, more like wolf tracks."

"Was it a wolf, then? I never heard a wolf make that noise."

"Couldn't be a wolf. Shep's not afraid of a wolf; he'd tackle a wolf, any time."

"Dear me!" sighed his mother. "I don't like to have such things around. I wish your father was here."

"Don't you worry, ma," comforted Terry. "I'll fix it if it doesn't keep away. I'll watch to-night."

"But it might get *you!*" protested his mother. "And then what would I do?"

"Shucks!" scoffed Terry. "I'll hide on top the shed, with the gun; and when it comes—bang!"

His mother laughed.

"I really believe you would," she said. "But we'll see. Anyway, what will we do to-day? There are so many things."

"Got to water the mare and her colt, and stake her out," answered Terry, business-like. "Feed the chickens, first, and let 'em rustle. Suppose I'd better make the garden."

"You feed the chickens while I'm clearing off the table; and then we'll look about the ranch. I didn't half see it last evening."

Terry threw the chickens a few handfuls of grain—and he noted that the grain sack was getting low. He left the mare and her colt to wait a little longer, while he and his mother toured the premises.

On the side of a small hill back of the cabin they found the spring. Mr. Richards had hollowed it out, so that the water stood two feet deep and could be dipped up, clear and cold. Thence, from the edge of the hole, it trickled away, and was lost in the sod.

"We ought to build a spring house, Terry," proposed his mother. "Like we had back home—in our other home, I mean. We can lead the water nearer the cabin, can't we, and set our butter and milk in it, to keep them cool!"

"Sure," agreed Terry, manfully. "And we can sink a barrel with a lid on it, for dipping water out of."

That was one job. The dugout, too—and Terry figured on how he could add the spring house to it and lead the water there—would require fixing over. His mother thought they should have better steps into it, and it needed more shelves, and the roof leaked. Another job. And the window sashes must be attached to the cabin windows, before the flies got too bad. And the wagon still contained a mass of stuff which must be distributed; and the wagon top ought to be removed, so that the wagon might be stowed in under cover, out of the rain. But the kitchen garden seemed to be of the most urgent importance, and before she went in to set the cabin more to rights, Terry's mother selected the place where the garden should be digged.

He took the mare and her colt to water. The creek was a dandy, by daylight; quite wide, and looked deep and "fishy," and he made up his mind that he'd try it with hook and line just as soon as he could get an hour or two off. If it had fish in it, what luck! He looked well at the timber patch, for the turkeys, or whatever they were; but he didn't see any. It was a large patch, a real little forest, thick with brush and trees: a good haunt for that beast. Shep kept well clear of it, which was suspicious; and at the creek's edge the mare snorted and stared about before drinking. And see—there in the soft mud just above, was the beast's track, again!

It was clearly imprinted—five toes, forming a fringe for a round pad impressed the size of his hand. Now

Shep had found it, and sniffing, shrank, to cower back, growling. The track alone was enough for Shep, who rarely before had showed such fear. Pondering, Terry conducted the old mare back, toward the cabin, and staked her out to graze. He stripped the rattlesnake of its skin, and tacked the split hide broadside on the cabin. Threw the carcass to the chickens. Now he must tackle the garden.

His mother, bustling about the cabin and actually singing, occasionally looked out, to watch the progress. Terry sweated and puffed, wielding the spade. Whew, but this was hard work! The prairie sod was thick and tough, forming a mat laid firmly and trodden ever more firm by the march of the years. It was full of the roots of sage and other shrubs, and Terry's spade was constantly getting tangled. In fact, he had to fight for every inch, before he could tear the spade-fuls loose and turn them over.

"I don't believe you can ever do it, Terry," spoke his mother, surveying him as he stopped to take breath and wipe his face.

"You wait," replied Terry, struck with a thought. "I'll use the plow." He dropped the spade and hustled away.

The plow was in pieces, having been taken apart so as to be packed easier. It was a new plow, but all the bolts were hanging to it, and after a little figuring and about half an hour's tussle he had it put together. Then he must yoke Spot and Buck and bring them up, and attach them to it. He knew how to drive them, at least, whether or not he knew how to plow; that

he would learn, somehow. He might as well begin now as later.

His mother stood watching, as at his word Buck and Spot dragged the plow on its side, to position, and with a heave he turned it upright. Now, he supposed, all that he need do was to hold to the handles and bid the oxen go ahead, and keep them in a straight line.

"Buck! Spot! Yip! Yip with you! Haw, Buck! Now! Hep! Gwan!"

They tugged; with a jump the plow blade bit into the sod, almost burying itself, and stuck fast, throwing Terry forward between the handles. Whew!

"Whoa, Buck! Spot! Whoa, now." And swinging his legs and bearing down hard Terry gradually raised the blade. He must not let it dig so deep, again. "Gwan! Yip, Buck! Spot! Gee! Whoa-oa, gee! Now! Yip! Yip!"

Pitching Terry to and fro, and tearing his arms in their sockets, the plow forged ahead, sometimes ripping the sod in a great welt of rich black earth, again skipping a notch or two and barely scratching the surface. But Terry was afraid to halt, and drove on to the end, where he stopped the team and looked back. His mother was laughing.

"Why, Terry," she said. "You're cutting a pattern. Is that easier than digging with the spade?"

Terry scratched his head, and grinned. That *was* a funny furrow—as crooked as a rabbit track in the brush!

"Well, I've got to learn," he asserted. "It's harder than it looks, though. I can finish with the spade."

He turned Buck and Spot about, and started around. He did a little better, although with many a "Haw!" and "Whoa!" and "Gee!" He was making a fine straight furrow, barring a few bulges to right and left; the plow certainly beat the spade, for cutting the sod, and progressed with a series of pops as it snapped the tough roots. The worst feature was those big roots, of the shrubs. Once in a while they proved to be veritable tartars, snagging the blade fast, throwing Terry into the handles, and then suddenly bursting loose with a jerk that wrenched him almost in two. The plow was stronger than he, he found.

Still, he determined to stick at it, and take his medicine. If he was to be a man and run the ranch, he certainly must know how to plow. And shaking his head when his mother urged him to quit and rest, he was so interested in making each furrow better than the others, that the hail of a new voice came so unexpectedly as to make him jump.

"What do you think you're doing? Plowing?"

It was George Stanton, sitting on a horse—a spotted horse—and eying him critically.

"Sure," answered Terry. "Beats spading. Where'd you come from?" And he trudged over, to shake hands. He was tremendously glad to see George, and he was rather proud to have been found hard at work, like a regular ranchman. That plowed patch showed up in great shape. It was no shucks of a patch, even if some of the furrows were crooked!

"Pop and I rode up from Manhattan. We're going back and get the outfit. Say, did you know our ranch

joins yours, right south? Well, it's so. I was hoping this was your cabin, when I saw it. I rode over on purpose to spy out. Come on and go back with me, and I'll show you where we live. You haven't got to plow, have you? Where's your father?"

That sobered Terry. Where *was* his father? He didn't mind the plowing, but—oh, pshaw, his father!

"Why, he isn't here. My father isn't here. He fell off the horse in the creek, when we were crossing, and we don't know *where* he is. We can't find him, but we've his hat, and I'm getting things in shape until he comes."

"Is he coming, sure?" asked George, much astonished.

"Of course he is," declared Terry. "Ma thinks so and so do I."

"Aren't you going to look for him?"

"We did look for him, till we had to move on and get someplace before dark. And a man named Sol Judy's helping us. He found the hat, away up in the willows; didn't he, ma?" For Mrs. Richards was standing in the door of the cabin, ready to greet George.

She nodded.

"Won't you come in, George? It's nearly dinner time."

"No, 'm; thank you. I've got to go back. Is that the truth Terry's telling me—about his father? I'm awful sorry."

"Yes, it's the truth; but his father'll come, we're sure. We sha'n't give him up; shall we, Terry! We did look for him, but it's such a big country, and there

are so few people, we don't know exactly what to do. You can tell your father to keep a watch-out for him, will you? He's wandered off, we think. Terry's doing the man's work, you see. We ought to get our garden in; so he can't go back with you, now."

"I'm awful sorry," repeated George. "Yes, I'll tell pop, and I'll bring him over as soon as I can. We can help you out, too. Our house'll be only about a mile and a step from here, other side of that hill. We all can go to and fro easy. Did you kill that snake? He's a whopper."

"Yes; he was under the floor. And we had another caller last night. Some old animal howled around and scared Shep and the horses and ma and me, too, so I went out and shot at him, right beside the corral. His tracks are there yet."

"Whereabouts? Did you hit him? Lemme see," demanded George, excited and tumbling off his horse.

"Along the fence, other side the corral," directed Terry.

Away ran George, and examined.

"I should say!" he panted, coming back. "I know what that was. It was a panther. We had one in the timber near our farm in Indiana. You want to look out. He'll take all your chickens and that colt. He was after the colt last night, I bet you. Panthers would rather have a colt than anything else."

"Goodness me!" exclaimed Mrs. Richards. "I guess it was. I never thought about a panther."

"He lives down in that timber, yonder. That's where he lives," asserted George, importantly. "I'll tell pop and he'll come over and shoot him for you."

"Shucks!" said Terry. "We've got a lot of turkeys—wild turkeys—roosting in that timber. We saw 'em last night; didn't we, ma! I'm going down there and get one, and if Mr. Panther shows up I'll get *him*, too."

"Maybe he'll get *you*," retorted George. "Wait for us, and we'll all go after him."

"I'm not afraid of him," called Terry, as George galloped off with a wave of his hand.

"Don't talk foolishly, Terry," rebuked his mother. "You'd better not meddle with that panther until he meddles with you. If you aren't afraid of him you ought to be. Brave people aren't ashamed to be afraid."

"Well, he can't have our colt," declared Terry, stubbornly. "He was after it last night and maybe he'll be after it again to-night. Anyhow, I can go down after a turkey, can't I?"

"Sometimes," smiled his mother. "But I'll go, too, to look after you."

"Oh, mother!" scoffed Terry. "I've got to learn to take care of myself, haven't I? I'll have to go lots of places where you can't go, if I run this ranch." And he resumed his plowing.

He kept steadily at it until dinner; and really, he accomplished a great deal. In fact, the garden was about all plowed. Next he would finish it with the spade, and then he'd have to rake out the roots, and smooth it over, and put in the seeds. More than one day would be required, to make that garden—which was a big one, for corn and potatoes and squash and everything. Anyway, the plowed ground was a beginning, and gave the place a farm look.

His mother had done wonders, in tidying the inside of the cabin and driving pegs to hang things on; and after dinner she had Terry help her while she stretched muslin against the ceiling of the loft, also, and tacked it there, as a dust preventer. The loft had a much more cosy air.

"We must shingle that roof some day, Terry," she said. "Your father put the sod on because it was quicker, but he said it wouldn't be permanent. It's so dirty, and it's liable to get soaked through and drip mud."

"I'll shingle it," assured Terry. "Got to have shingles, first."

"Maybe Mr. Stanton will know how to make them," she proposed. "A sod roof is very warm, though, they claim; and I suppose the longer it stays the harder it gets."

"We can plant some vegetables up there, ma," chuckled Terry. "It's growing hay for us, already."

"And sun-flowers," added his mother. "I saw a sun-flower with a bud."

Terry had thought to finish the garden to-day, but after dinner he was easily persuaded to change off. The plow handles had blistered his palms, his back felt twisted, and he had barked his shins against various obstacles, until he was rather of a wreck. Yet this garden patch was nothing as compared with the half mile square of acres waiting to be disposed of.

This afternoon all that he did was to remove the hood from the wagon, by stripping off the canvas and extracting the hickory bows from their sockets; and

to take most of the stuff out of the wagon; and with his mother's help to back the wagon under the shed.

By the time this had been accomplished it was almost sunset, and he thought upon those turkeys. In his opinion he deserved a turkey, and so did his mother. Of course, at first she didn't want him to go.

"I'll just be down at the edge of the timber, ma," he explained, "and watch there, and when the turkeys come in to roost I'll shoot one and hurry right home."

"You won't go into the timber, Terry?" she cautioned.

"No, 'm."

"And you won't stay long, and you'll stay where I can see you?"

"But I'll have to hide, ma," protested Terry. "If you see me the turkeys'll see me, too."

Finally she said that he might go; and slinging on powder-flask and shot-pouch, taking Shep and the gun he hurried off before she changed her mind. He couldn't stay long, anyway, because he had the chores to do.

The creek skirted the edge of the timber. He had an idea that the turkeys would drink, before going to bed; and that if he hid between the water and the trees he'd have a better chance. So he crossed the creek by a series of fast jumps, at a shallow place, and was on the edge of the timber.

He halted, and peered in, and listened. Now in the daylight, with Shep and the gun, he was not a bit afraid of any panther if he could only see it. He couldn't see it. A panther would be very silly to sit

out in sight. But the timber was a great place. A panther ought to like all that brush and those thickly branched trees; yet perhaps he wasn't here at all. Terry cautiously advanced, his every sense alert for danger, and at his heels Shep imitated him.

A semi-circle of flowering bushes, on the edge of the timber, fronting the creek and giving a view up and down the creek, seemed to offer a splendid ambush for turkeys. He could see the cabin from it, too—and his mother, who had stood watching him ever since he had left. He waved at her figure, and she waved back; and then he sank into hiding. Shep crouched beside him.

It was pleasant here, with the low sun flooding the landscape, and scarce a sound to be heard except the twittering of a few birds. All the broad valley basked in evening. Shep went to sleep, and Terry had about concluded that they both were due to return to chores without their turkey, when he heard a peculiar little piping babble. He strained his ears, and gazed nervously up and down the creek. That babble was turkey babble, just as on a farm! Shep had awakened, and with ears pricked he, also, was gazing around.

Hah! There they came—the turkeys, ambling along the creek, on this side, as if they might have alighted just beyond, or have emerged from the timber. Led by a fussy big gobbler, they were pecking about, or preening themselves, as they crossed a curve of the creek course, where the brush was thin and low and sunny. This evidently was their feeding and drinking hour, before they went to roost.

What huge, beautiful birds they were! Larger than tame turkeys, and much more shiny. The big gobbler's mighty breast glinted as if he wore a coat of brazen mail, and his broad tail spread like an aurora borealis—or at least like the pictures of one.

The flock of turkeys were heading in Terry's direction, and if he waited long enough they were likely to come right within gunshot of the ambush. He watched them, hoping and admiring. He made up his mind to choose one of the smaller birds, and not the big old gobbler who was the father of the flock. On a sudden, while his mind was full of turkey, he heard a peculiar scratchy noise behind him. Around he twisted, very quick.

From the crotch of the nearest tree, only about ten yards away, back of him, the panther, or *a* panther, standing, snarled at him an instant, then leaped lightly to the ground and was gone. Terry stared, almost paralyzed with astonishment. Of course it was a panther—a long-bodied, long-tailed, round-faced tawny cat, larger than Shep; and such a mouth, flannel red and set with glistening white fangs! Why, that panther must have been lying in the tree all the time, probably watching him and Shep; and the scratchy sound was the sound of its claws when it rose to leap down.

Half rising, clutching his cocked gun, Terry listened, and searched the brush with wide eyes. Shep was trembling. He didn't like panthers; they were new to him. Now the turkeys were murmuring inquiringly, with heads up—and see, the panther was stalking them. That was why he had left the tree. He preferred

turkey to boy or dog. Terry glimpsed the tawny shape of him, low against the ground, crawling cat-like from bush to bush, over near the turkey flock.

Inconceivably swift, and even before the turkeys had located him or Terry was real certain, himself, the panther had launched in two springs: the first carried him into the open, the second instantly carried him on top of a turkey—the big gobbler himself. With a chorus of frightened peeps the rest of the flock scattered and disappeared, leaving there in the open space the great cat, crouched, the big turkey under his spread paws—just like any cat with a captured bird.

The turkey either was dead, or numbed with fright, for he made never a move. The panther's long tail switched from side to side, as he glared about, challenging anybody to dispute him. That made Terry mad. Why, the panther had picked out the best turkey in the flock; Terry had wanted that turkey for himself, but had passed him by because he was so kingly and was the father of the flock. And now the panther had taken him. Up bobbed Terry, and forward he charged, shouting angrily.

“Get out o’ there! Drop that turkey! Drop him, I say!”

The great cat's eyes narrowed—they were yellow eyes—and blazed with a cruel green light, while flat to his head fell his ears and his mouth opened in a prodigious savage snarl. Terry could see past his inch-long fangs and his curled red tongue, far into his crimson throat. His round face was the face of a demon. He did not mean to budge. Shep barked wildly, but kept close to his master.

To Terry's shoulder jumped his gun—his father's gun, that is; longer than he was tall. "Bang! Bang!" spoke both barrels, almost at once. Terry scarcely was conscious of taking aim, he was so indignant at the panther; but with the reports the panther gave a spring straight into the air, and rolling over and over threshed about on the ground, making a bloody trail. Shep darted forward——

"Shep! Come here, Shep! Here! Quit it!" ordered Terry, so excited that he was forgetting to reload.

Shep had boldly closed with the writhing cat; the two hind paws caught him in the chest and with a convulsive kick sent him flying head over heels a dozen feet away. But even by the time Shep had gathered himself together, somewhat subdued, the panther was quiet; the kick had been his last effort. To tell the truth, Terry had shot his head almost off, and whatever he had done he had done blindly. Now he was stretched and motionless; he was a dead panther.

CHAPTER VII

HARD WORK AHEAD

TERRY stood panting, not quite certain that a panther with head blown to smithereens was done being dangerous. Shep, a long red scratch down his chest, where the animal's claws had ripped him, advanced, bristles up, tail low, nose out-stretched to smell. He sniffed gingerly, in a circle, before he gained confidence to get within striking distance. But the panther did not stir. Now the turkey piped feebly, and rustled in the grass, and drew Terry's attention. He had forgotten the big gobbler.

The big gobbler wasn't dead, but he was badly shaken. One wing hung as if broken, and his neck was crooked from a bite apparently clear through it. They cautiously approached him. A turkey gobbler was no mean enemy, when fighting mad. However, this gobbler was harmless. His eyes were closed with a film, and although he fluttered about, it was in a dazed, drunken fashion.

"Get away, Shep," ordered Terry, to the curious Shep. And he added, with a great idea: "I'm going to take him home."

It required considerable nerve to touch that gobbler, harmless though he might be. Terry busily stripped

off his coat, and throwing it over the gobbler tied the arms, thus wrapping him securely. The gobbler was too sick to resist; in fact, the handling seemed to frighten him; maybe he thought that the panther had returned to finish him. At any rate he cowed right down, as if dying, and let Terry do with him as was necessary.

Now Terry was in a fix. That turkey weighed scandalously. He could scarcely carry him and the gun, too. He laid the turkey carefully down and considered the panther. The panther was longer than Terry; his tail alone—no, not *his* tail, but *her* tail, for Terry saw that it was a she panther instead of a tom—was longer than Terry. He might have slung the panther over his shoulder and dragged her that way, and he much wanted to do it, for his mother to see; but there was the big turkey, trussed and waiting. Well, he couldn't leave the gobbler, for some other panther to get, maybe; and he certainly was not going to waste his panther, either. The sun had set, and dusk was oozing in amidst the brush.

"Whoo-ee?" He heard a high hail. His mother's voice. He stood up and looked toward the cabin. There she was, already half way, and hastening anxiously on, summoned by the shots. Good for her! He yodeled back, and waved, and beckoned to her, and ran to meet her.

"What is it, Terry? What did you shoot? A turkey?"

"No, but I've got a turkey, and something else, too. Come and see."

"I can't cross the creek."

"All right. Wait a minute."

Away he dashed, plashing recklessly through the water, and grabbed the turkey. He staggered with it, across again, to his mother.

"Why, Terry!"

"It's hurt, ma. I didn't shoot it. A panther jumped it. We'll take it home. Maybe it'll get well. It's a big old gobbler, king of the flock. Now wait a minute more."

He placed the helpless gobbler at her feet, and back he sped, to get the panther. He made no bones of catching her by the limp tail (it was like a furry rope) and hind legs, and hoisting her on his shoulder, where she doubled over and dragged fore and aft. Clutching his faithful gun, away he went.

It was hard to tell which was Terry and which was panther. No wonder, when he approached, breathless and gory, that his mother threw up her two hands and exclaimed:

"Terry! Land o' goodness! Where did you get that awful creature?"

"I shot it, ma," panted Terry. "It's a panther—a regular panther. She jumped the turkey and I popped her. I shot her head off. See? Wish I hadn't. You ought to have seen her open her mouth at me! Shep was afraid, too. She sent him flying. It was lucky for him she hadn't any head left. Look where she scratched him up?"

"But, Terry! What on earth are you going to do with her?"

"Take her home, of course. Skin her. Don't believe she's good to eat. You carry the turkey and I'll carry her."

"Don't you come near me, though," warned his mother. "Isn't the turkey dead, too?" And she gently picked up the gobbler, wrapped in Terry's coat with his blue head sticking out and dangling.

"No, not unless his neck's broken. The panther bit it. I don't think it's broken, though. His wing is. But we can mend his wing. We'll keep him, anyhow; and if he gets well we'll tame him. Maybe I can catch some more."

So they trudged homeward, bearing the spoils of the chase; and a strange spectacle they made. Terry felt like a mighty hunter; much more so than when plowing a garden. To think, here he had gone out just a little way from the cabin, and on his own land—his and his father's and mother's—had got a wild turkey and a big panther! Huh! Wait till he showed George Stanton! And there was the rattlesnake, too!

At the cabin he dumped the panther, and then he and his mother unwrapped the turkey and examined him. Yes, his wing was broken, but his neck wasn't. Somehow, although the panther's fangs had penetrated through and through, they had missed the bones. One more bite was needed. Still, the gobbler was pretty sick. They bound his wing close to his side, and encircled his wounded neck with a strip of flannel, and put him into the coop in which the chickens had ridden. There they left him, with water and a little corn. He lay just as they had placed him, so they stretched a

gunny-sack over the front of the coop, to shield him.

Terry couldn't fuss with the panther any more just now, for the chores were to be done. The old mare and her colt must be led to water as usual, and the chickens must be shut up, and wood must be brought in to the stove, and the waterpail must be filled, and so forth and so forth. He promised himself that he would skin the panther after supper, or maybe in the morning.

He brought in an armful of wood, and a pail of water, and went for the mare. She snorted at him, and pulled back.

"It's your shirt and trousers, Terry," called his mother. "You're all blood. I don't believe you can do a thing with her until you change. You ought to change, anyway."

That was queer. No, sir; the old mare was afraid of him. She smelled the panther. Therefore he had to bolt up to his loft and change his clothes. Even then she was very suspicious.

The quicker the panther's pelt was tackled, the easier would it be removed. But after supper Terry was simply too dog-tired to sit up. That had been a long day, beginning with the plowing and ending with the hunt. Besides, his mother wouldn't let him bring the panther carcass into the cabin, because of the muss he would make with it; and to skin it outdoors by candle flicker would take all night, about. Anyway—hee-yaw! And yawning so widely that his mouth rivaled the panther's, carrying his candle he climbed the ladder, to bed. That was a good place.

Terry was determined to beat his mother at getting up, in the morning, and to make a start on the panther before breakfast. The night passed peacefully; and when the sun rose, he had risen, too. He stole softly down, boots in his hands, and presently was busy with butcher-knife and panther.

He had "skinned" musk-rats and rabbits and squirrels, back in his other home, but this great animal was a different matter. The pelt was so thick! He was working hard, and his mother was at last stirring around, when he heard the soft hoof-thuds of a pony. Shep growled, then barked. Terry hastily looked up from his bloody task (of which he was sick already) and saw trotting across the prairie bottom, toward the cabin, two riders. Indians! Yes, but Delawares, for one was young General Jackson!

Terry paused, squatting over the panther carcass, and waved greeting.

"How-do-do?" said General Jackson, halting his pony. "Where get 'um?"

Terry rose, gory and cramped.

"Down in the timber."

"Who kill 'um?"

"I did."

"Huh! When kill 'um?"

"Last night."

"You kill 'um? All 'lone?"

"That's right. Shot her head off," asserted Terry, proudly.

General Jackson seemed unbelieving. He grunted a few syllables to his companion, and dismounted from his pony, for a closer inspection.

"How see 'um?"

"She was yelling 'round the house, the night before, and when I went out she was at the corral, sneaking on the horses. Shot at her then, but didn't hit her. Then I went down to the timber after turkeys, and she was right in a tree watching me but I didn't know it till she jumped out after the turkeys." General Jackson was listening intently; he nodded and grunted. Terry continued. "She lit on top of a turkey, and I ran out at her and popped her. Gee, she was mad till I blew her head off. And I got the turkey, too. He's in a coop. Maybe he's going to live."

"Didn't kill turkey?" queried General Jackson.

"No. Broke his wing and bit him in the neck, is all."

The other Indian, who was very dark and short, reached and patted Terry on the shoulder and uttered some words.

"That Black Beaver. Big Delaware hunter," quoth General Jackson. "He say you brave boy; heap brave. Huh! You no kill 'um panther, 'um panther kill you. Humph! Heap panther. She panther more bad than he panther. You be big hunter, too. When Delaware kill panther, Delaware proud. What you do now?"

"I'm skinning her," explained Terry. "Isn't good to eat, is she? You want any?"

General Jackson drew back quickly, and shook his head.

"No. Delaware no eat panther. Bad medicine; make bad luck. 'Um fur no good; not now. Fur loose—see?" and reaching he plucked out a fingerful of

hair; evidently the panther was shedding, the season being warm spring. "Nail 'um up, on cabin; tell odder panthers keep away. Mebbe you wear claws 'round neck. Tell 'um people you big hunter; kill panther."

Terry hadn't thought of that! It sounded like a great scheme, though. He looked reflectively at the carcass, half peeled. Shucks! Then the fur wasn't any use, was it? Anyway, he could tack the pelt up, to dry; it would make a showing, beside the rattlesnake skin. Meanwhile the two Delawares were fingering the carcass, and were especially interested in the long tail, and the paws.

"You know how skin panther?" demanded General Jackson. "Me show."

He examined Terry's butcher-knife, shook his head at the dullness of point and blade, whipped out his own knife from its beaded sheath, and with Black Beaver holding the carcass and turning it, cut the pelt away with astonishing rapidity. He accomplished more in ten minutes than Terry had accomplished in an hour.

"Nail 'um up," he bade. "No dress 'um. Not good 'nough. Better one 'nodder time. Mebbe get 'um he panther, when 'um come looking for 'um's squaw."

"Why? Will there be another one?" demanded Terry, excited.

General Jackson nodded.

"One 'um, two 'um," he said, holding up two fingers—and Black Beaver, as if understanding, nodded also. "One 'um she panther, one 'um he panther. Kill 'um snake?" he asked, seeing the rattler's skin.

"Sure," answered Terry, feeling quite set up with himself.

"Huh!" approved General Jackson. He and Black Beaver were cutting the panther's claws from the pads. They were long, cruel claws, sharp as needles and curved wickedly.

"Make 'um neck," he proffered—meaning necklace. "Put on boy. Know how?"

Terry wasn't certain that he did.

"Me take 'um, have squaw make 'um," proffered General Jackson. "Bring 'um back. All right?"

"Why—yes; much obliged," replied Terry. "Will you?"

General Jackson tucked the claws away in a pouch that he wore. He turned and went back to his pony, and untied from it a large, bulky package that looked like deer hide. This he handed to Terry.

"Meat," he said. "Mebbe you eat 'um. You mudder, mebbe she eat 'um. You fadder, mebbe he eat 'um. Good; 'um deer."

"Is that for us?" exclaimed Terry. "Thanks ever so much. You kill it?"

"Um," nodded General Jackson. "Send 'um, my mudder. Cure 'um eyes, your mudder. Swap. Heap glad."

"Look at this, ma," cried Terry, to his mother who had appeared in the doorway. "Deer meat—a lot of it," for wrapped in its hide was almost half a deer. "General Jackson brought it. We'll have some for breakfast."

"That's very kind of him, I'm sure," she responded, warmly; and she smiled greeting to the two Delawares. "Have them wait a minute." In she whisked, to reappear with the coffee-pot and two tin cups.

"Put in plenty of sugar," warned Terry, wisely.

"I did," she informed.

General Jackson and Black Beaver were nothing loth to accept the coffee, and drank each two brimming cups of it, heavily sugared.

"Go, now," quoth General Jackson. "Come again. G'bye."

He and Black Beaver gravely shook hands with Terry and his mother, and turned to the ponies.

"You know my father?" Terry asked, of General Jackson, out of sudden thought. "He's gone; lost; fell in creek, off of pony. If you see him, let us know."

"Mehbe so see 'um," grunted General Jackson. "Come again, soon. Take white boy on big hunt. White boy heap hunter. G'bye," and evidently with high respect for a boy who had killed a panther, he and Black Beaver loped away.

"We've got meat enough for a week, now, ma," announced Terry, in high feather. "General Jackson rode over on purpose to give it to us, because you cured his mother's eyes. And they helped me skin the panther, and I'm going to tack the skin up for other panthers to see and take notice. There'll be this panther's husband around, they say. But the fur's no good this time of year. It's all loose. General Jackson says I ought to wear the claws for a necklace; he's taken them with him, to string 'em. I guess those Delawares'll be friends of ours."

"We'll hang the meat in the shade, after I've cut some off for breakfast," answered his mother. "I'll

have to make another pot of coffee. You can be washing. You're a perfect sight. How's the turkey?"

"Haven't had time to look at him yet. Want to tack this skin up, first, to dry. Then I'll wash and then I'll look at the gobbler."

Terry had just time enough to tack the skin, inside out, against the logs of the cabin, and to wash his hands, before the coffee and breakfast were ready. The venison had been sizzling for five minutes. It tasted even better than it smelled. Tender? Um-m-m! And sweet? Um-m-m! Hurrah for General Jackson!

"As soon as I get time I'm going out and find deer for ourselves," proclaimed Terry. "There'll be some around, now I've killed that panther."

"First you'll finish that garden, won't you?" laughed his mother. "The garden's important. And you know we must get our ranch in shape, before winter. There's lots to be done—oh, lots and lots."

"That's so," admitted Terry, soberly. Things didn't look very favorable for hunting and other fun; not to a boy who had to do the work of a man. "Anyway," he added, "maybe I can go on a big hunt with the Delawares, sometime; just once. They want to take me."

"I hope so," agreed his mother. "Now let's look at the turkey, and then you do your chores and I'll do mine, and after that you can finish the garden."

"Do you think dad'll turn up to-day?" ventured Terry.

"Perhaps," and when he saw his mother's eyes fill he wished that he hadn't spoken so. But she smiled again, and kissed him. "If he doesn't he may come to-

morrow, or next day; and we'll work right ahead, so as to make a big showing when he does come."

There was good news from the gobbler. He was on his feet, and had eaten some corn. His neck was still crooked, but it had begun to heal, and probably his wing was healing, too. At any rate, he was much more lively, and was better than a dozen dead turkeys. However, he didn't like to be looked in at; he cowered and pressed to the back side of the coop, for he still was wild. So they closed him in again, and left him alone.

"I really think he's going to get well," declared Terry's mother. "What'll we do with him?"

"Keep him, and I'll catch a hen turkey in a trap and we'll raise young ones," proposed Terry, gleefully. "I'll make a pen for him."

Terry did his chores. He buried the panther carcass. Then came the garden; oh, what a job, just as yesterday! He had finished plowing, and was attaching the oxen to the harrow, so as to rake off the brush and clods, when who should come galloping up but Mr. Stanton and George. This gave him a chance to stand and ease his aching back.

"You can't harrow that, my boy," at once exclaimed Mr. Stanton. "Your harrow teeth will get all clogged. What you want is a drag. Have you heard from your father?"

"No, sir," said Terry. "Have you?"

"Not a sign, I'm sorry to say. But he's somewhere. I feel certain of that. Don't give him up. Good-morning, Mrs. Richards. We're ridden over on a neighborly call, is all."

"Oh, pop! Look at the big panther skin!" cried George. "Cracky! Who got him, Terry? You?"

"Terry's the one," affirmed Terry's mother. And Terry could see that she was as proud as he. "He did it all alone."

"That is a big one," appraised Mr. Stanton. "I vow! And that's the rattler, too, is it? Good for Terry! Where'd you get the panther, Terry?"

"Did you shoot him yourself?" demanded George, eagerly.

Terry had to tell all about it, again; and at mention of the Delawares and the necklace and the venison George was roundly envious.

"Shucks! And I've done nothing but help build our house," he complained. "Wish a panther would come on our land."

"I don't," asserted his father. "We aren't looking for panthers. Now," he added, to Terry, "if we can find a rail I'll show you how to polish off that garden patch in short order. Got any spikes?"

"Not many," confessed Terry, ruefully. "Dad didn't bring many nails. Suppose I'll have to buy some."

Even in 1858 nails were not very common in the west of the United States. Wooden pins were used for fastening rafters and large boards. This cabin erected by Terry's father had scarcely a nail in it. But in the emigrant outfit Mr. Richards had included a handful of rough, hand-made spikes, and Terry ran to get them.

"Those will do," nodded Mr. Stanton. "Now for

the rail. As soon as we get our fences up there'll be plenty of rails."

A rough-sawed plank ten feet long, two inches thick and eight or ten inches wide had been laid over the eaves of the shed, as if to hold the sod in place. They took this down, drove the spikes into the flat of it, until the heads projected about eight inches, in a row. The ox-chain and a rope were run from either end of the plank, to the yoke of Buck and Spot; and standing on the middle of the plank, to hold it down, Mr. Stanton rode the length of the garden patch, dragging a space as wide as the plank was long. The spikes were undermost; and caught the brush and weeds in great style.

Having witnessed, Terry mounted. The plank of course bucked and jumped, and to ride it required quite a knack. The gathered brush piled up in front in a windrow, and when it was about to force him from his foothold, he had to stop and clear it away by armfuls. But the job of riding was about as much fun (he imagined) as riding a boat through the breakers.

George cheered and whooped and was especially delighted when Terry fell off. Mr. Stanton keenly watched.

"I've a proposition to make to you, Terry," he said, as Terry was turning the oxen again. "When you get your garden in, and your mother can spare you for a bit, fetch your span down to our place. A smart boy and a yoke of oxen are worth money in this country. I'll give you a dollar a day for you and your yoke, to help us clear our land; and to make things even George and I'll help you clear yours. You can't break sod

and put up fences alone. Will you swap labor—with a dollar a day to boot? ”

“ I will if ma’ll let me,” gasped Terry, overjoyed.

“ Maybe I’ll come to-morrow.”

“ All right. That’s a bargain,” spoke Mr. Stanton.

“ Let’s go home, George.”

“ Be sure and come,” called back George, as they cantered away.

Terry went on with his dragging. As he gaily rode the plank, he felt that he and his mother were going to manage very nicely.

CHAPTER VIII

THE BROTHERHOOD OF THE SNAKE

TERRY finished the garden by the middle of the afternoon. He planted it to potatoes (one eye to a nill, for potatoes were valuable), sweet corn for the table and yellow corn for meal, beets, turnips, carrots, squash, pumpkin, beans, and peas. His mother was rather doubtful as to the peas, because they were put in so late; by the rich appearance of the ground the other things ought to do finely. It was a large garden; it looked almost too large for one small family: but what they didn't use when ripe they could store away. Winter was coming, some day. They must prepare for it, like the squirrels did.

He even had time to figure on the spring house, but before he had begun actual work on it, his evening chores called him. Those ranch days seemed all too short, when there was everything to do, and little to do with.

"You aren't afraid to stay alone, are you, ma?" he asked, in the morning, when he was about to start for the Stanton place.

"You can leave me Shep," she said. "I won't be afraid with him."

Shep would have preferred going to staying; but at

his master's "Go back, Shep! You stay," stay he did—his ears pricked while he watched Terry trudge away, driving Buck and Spot yoked together.

Terry felt rather important. Here he was, hired out with self and team, already, like any man, to join with other men in the settlement of the country. If, as George's father had said, an ox-team and a boy were worth money in Kansas, perhaps he could earn a whole lot.

The oxen plodded slowly, dragging their chain. The Stanton place proved not difficult to find. In about half an hour he crossed the little divide, and on the other side he saw the new cabin, which must be the Stanton cabin, for no other cabin was in sight. Yes, the Stanton place this was; as now he approached, George waved at him, little Virgie flourished her sunbonnet, and Mrs. Stanton appeared in the doorway.

The Stantons had achieved much in a short time. Their cabin was of rough-sawed new boards, instead of logs, with a board roof also; and their out-buildings were of boards. Mr. Stanton had hired the hauling done, from Fort Riley, south, where the lumber and all had been delivered from Fort Leavenworth, far to the northeast, by the big freighting firm of Russell, Majors & Waddell. Everything had been cut to measure at the mill. According to George, a house complete with doors and windows could be shipped by boat and ox-teams clear from St. Louis to central Kansas, and set up in a day, like putting together a puzzle. But saw-mills were being rapidly established in Kansas—there was one at Fort Riley and a new one at Manhattan;

so that even here on the Kansas frontier lumber could be procured.

"Hello, Terry," greeted Mr. Stanton, coming from a shed. "Ready for business?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, I've got some carpentering to do, and I'll set you and George at plowing those bottom acres. The ground's soft, there, and the two yoke can pull through without trouble. But it will take the both of you to hold the plow."

The plow was a much larger one than Terry's, with a twenty-four-inch blade instead of a twelve-inch, and iron mold-boards instead of wooden ones. The plow blade (which is fastened to the mold boards) was of cast iron tipped with steel.

Ned and Bonny were put in as the first, for the pole yoke; and Buck and Spot were hooked in front of them, as the lead yoke. George's father was a practical farmer. In Indiana he had broken the land, about as he was to break the land in Kansas.

The bottom-land, green and level, with grass to one's knees, was ideal for corn, said Mr. Stanton.

"I've set up a stake yonder," he directed, pointing. "That's your guide, for the first furrow, so you'll plow reasonably straight. This is your corner, to start from. Only one of you can do the driving, but it'll need the two of you to hold the plow. Get your first furrow straight, and lay the others by that. George knows."

"All right," sung George. "Terry'll drive; his yoke are the lead. Come on, Terry."

Terry swung the two yoke into position, and he and George turned the plow over for business. Away they gallantly went, aiming for the stake; and the thick sod "popped" as the heavy blade ripped through. The sod here was tougher than at the garden patch; every now and then a mass of roots almost stopped the plow, jerking the two boys forward and throwing them back again.

"Hold hard," encouraged George.

"Hold hard," repeated Terry. "Buck! Haw! Haw, Buck! Spot!"

Steering the plow like a ship in a powerful sea they were tugged along, leaving behind them a wide black wake. By the time that they arrived at the stake, they were dripping with sweat and the four oxen were steaming.

"Pshaw!" exclaimed Terry, ruefully, as they paused, at the stake, and looked back. "That's no shakes of a furrow. I thought we were aiming straight; didn't you?"

"Crooked as a snake track, isn't it!" admitted George. "Now dad'll laugh. But it's no easy job to hold this plow," and he wagged his head. "I've helped plow in Indiana; never had to wrestle like this, though."

"We'll keep going, anyway," quoth Terry. "Let's turn 'round."

They turned the oxen and the plow, and started again, determined to make this a straight furrow. But midway Terry gave a sudden jump and yelp; and yelping likewise George jumped in the opposite direction. The oxen stopped. As for the snake—and a snake it

was—untwisting where he had been thrown up by the plow he made off at a furious pace, George after him. George returned breathless.

“Couldn’t catch him,” he reported. “He’s a blue racer. Those blue racers can beat a horse.”

“Thought he was a bull-snake,” proffered Terry.

“No; he was long and slim, and a bull-snake’s thick with a big head.”

“We’d better watch out for rattlers,” observed Terry. “I’d hate to get one in my boot.”

“I should say!” agreed George. And he shouted, to Virgie, who was trudging down to them, from the cabin—some of the time through grass and flowers up to her yellow sunbonnet: “You stay there! Go back! Too many snakes!”

Virgie stopped, alarmed, and scuttled hastily for the cabin yard again.

Snakes! Why, this green bottom-land seemed to grow more snakes than anything else! What a lot of snakes Kansas appeared to have! Scarcely a furrow that did not disturb one kind or another, of snake: the blue racers, sheeny and beautiful, and as lithe and swift as a whip-lash; thick bodied, brown bull-snakes, five and six feet long, with blunt, large heads which hissed harmlessly; striped garter snakes; and what George, who was posted on snakes, claimed was a glass snake. The merest touch broke it into pieces, and the pieces wriggled away and hid. George asserted that the head found the body, again, and stuck itself on; and **then** the head and body found the tail, and stuck **that on**; and **the** snake was a good as before!

As for rattlers—whew! In the bottom there were occasional patches of jungle, where the grasses grew four feet high, and the sun-flowers towered above the backs of the oxen. These jungles were famous places for snakes, and particularly for rattlers. The oxen learned to stop and snort when they perceived a rattle-snake; sometimes the snake rattled and sometimes it didn't, but shot away, and escaped. When it coiled and stood its ground, Terry or George, swinging from a respectful distance, stunned it with the butt of the whip-stock and then finished it. That was safe work, for as everybody knew, a rattle-snake can strike only about half its length, from its coil.

"We ought to turn hogs in here," spoke George. "They'd clean out the snakes."

"But they'd get bit and die," objected Terry.

"No, siree! The hog lets the snake strike him on the cheek, where there's nothing but hard gristle. Then he steps all over the snake and cuts him up and eats him."

The furrows were now as straight and true as anybody could desire. The black swathes of upturned earth lay like broad strips of carpeting unrolled bunchily; and from the damp soil rose an earthy smell not at all unpleasant. Terry and George were coated to their boot-tops with the sticky dirt; the oxen were heaving, but still stanch.

Every four or five furrows they all stopped, to sharpen the nose of the plow with a coarse file. The tough roots fought a continual battle against the tough

steel. It was amazing what a difference there was between a sharp plow and a dull plow.

They had halted beside a bunch of tall flowering weeds and coarse grasses, and Terry was using the file on the plow nose, when it slipped and flew out of his hand into the weeds.

"Huh!" complained Terry, and reached in after it. This was a careless thing to do, but he was in a hurry. Suddenly, as he reached, the sharp whirr of a rattler sounded right under his nose.

"Look out!" ordered George; and surprised, Terry gave a great leap backward. Even as he landed he heard another short whirr—some soft object squirmed under his feet, and as he desperately sprang again, he felt a hard thump on his bootleg, followed by a prickling pain.

"I'm hit!" he cried. "He struck me, George! Oh, jiminy!"

A weight seemed to be attached to his leg; and gazing down behind as he took another hasty step he witnessed a long squirming object following his movement into the nearest furrow. He was dragging the snake with him—its fangs fast in his bootleg. The sight made him weak. But George was to the rescue in a jiffy, with the whip.

"He's caught! Stand still just a second—" for Terry's impulse was to run, and run, and run, and kick the snake off. But he held himself in. Down like lightning came the whip stock, with all George's strength—it thudded home so stoutly that it not only

mashed flat the brown back behind the ugly head but tore the fangs loose. And the snake lay quivering.

"Did he bite through?" demanded George, panting. "Sit down, quick! Gimme your boot. Let's see."

"Felt as though he did," quavered Terry, sinking into the furrow and tugging weakly at his boot. But George grabbed the boot from his hands, and hauled. Off it came. He rolled up the trousers leg—Terry trying to help—and stripped down the stocking. On the white skin over the shin-bone between knee and instep were two tiny red punctures; a pair of them, about an inch apart.

Terry gasped, frightened. George, however, was all business.

"Don't believe any poison got through," he asserted. "The skin's hardly broken. See? But I think we ought to widen up that place so it'll bleed. That'll wash it out. I'll do it now, quick."

He fished his knife from his trousers pocket, and opened the small blade.

"Hold steady," he bade. "You don't mind a little bit of pain, do you?"

"No. Go ahead," directed Terry, recovering his nerve.

George gave a brief series of swift, hard prods with the knife point. Terry drew keen breath as he felt the point dig and tear the flesh. The knife was not so *very* sharp—but not for the world would he have winced or complained; and after all, it was soon over. George squeezed the wound; and before Terry could stop him

he had put his mouth on it and sucked hard several times and spat.

"Here!" objected Terry. "What you doing?"

"Sucking the poison out, if there was any. Don't believe there was, though," retorted George. "He had to bite through your boot and pants and stocking; and then he hit right on the bone where you haven't got much meat or blood. Poison does no harm if it doesn't get into the circulation. I've seen lots of rattlers in Indiana. We always cut and suck the wound, to wash it out. People yonder stick a hunk of tobacco on it, too; but we haven't any tobacco. So we'll tie it up in mud. How you feeling?"

"All right," bravely asserted Terry. "I don't believe I'm hurt much."

"Of course you aren't," assured George—a very comforting sort of a partner as now he industriously gathered a handful of soft moist earth, clapped it on the wound, and proceeded to tie his bandanna handkerchief around, over the plaster. "We've played safe, anyhow. We didn't even wait to go to the house. The quicker you get after such things, the better. Want to put on your boot? It'll be all right."

"Sure," agreed Terry. He carefully folded his trouser leg and hauled his boot on, and scrambled up; stood a moment a little unsteadily, with George watching him; wriggled his wounded leg, and laughed. Then he sobered.

"Shake, George," he invited, extending his hand. "Maybe you saved my life. I guess we're brothers now."

"Aw—!" bluffed George, flushing, but shaking hands. "I didn't save anybody's life. You weren't struck bad. You'd have been all right. Most of the poison stayed on the outside of your boot—see the wet spot? But I'll be glad to be your brother."

"I was mighty scared, for a few minutes; 'specially when I saw what I was dragging 'round," confessed Terry. "I suppose I'd have been running yet, till I fell over."

"That's about the worst thing a fellow can do," accused George. "He ought to keep cool and keep his blood cool. But I wouldn't have blamed you. To drag a thing like that, by your boot, is no joke. Cracky, he's a big one, isn't he!"

They scanned the dead snake—as large a rattler as that killed by Terry in the cabin. He had the same number of rattles, too: thirteen and a button. Terry fished out his own knife, and boldly hacked the rattles off.

"Here," he said, holding them out to George. "You keep these, and I'll keep the set from my snake, at the cabin. We'll carry 'em in our pockets. And whenever we want help from each other, or something like that, we'll signal."

"Good!" exclaimed George. "Or we can hang 'em round our necks, and wear 'em in swimming and to bed and every place! Shake again, on the Brotherhood of the Rattlesnake. Allee same Injun—huh?"

They gripped brown strong hands, and shook.

"Now I'd better look for that file," proposed Terry. He picked up the whip and limping a little as he walked,

rather gingerly poked into the weed patch where he had flipped the file.

"Watch out, now!" warned George. "That may be this snake's wife or husband in there."

But whichever the first snake might have been, it had made off during the fracas; and reaching in, Terry drew the file to him and picked it up.

"How you feeling now?" queried George.

"All right," insisted Terry. And when they resumed their plowing he continued to feel all right, save for the slight smarting where George had prodded with the knife.

CHAPTER IX

TWO AMAZING ENCOUNTERS

TWELVE acres were ploughed for corn at the Stanton ranch; and then, aided by George, Terry ploughed twelve acres at his own and his mother's ranch. The corn was planted—and this was a tedious job, done by hand. One of them, either George or Terry, walked ahead, down each furrow, a sack of corn slung from his shoulder. Every two short steps, about, he dropped four kernels of corn; and following close with a hoe his partner covered the kernels.

This took time, but anyway, at last the corn was in.

Meanwhile, other work pressed. It seemed to Terry that everything needed him, at once. How rapidly the seeds that he put in did grow! The garden stuff fairly leaped out of the ground, and so did the weeds! Already his fingers had worn the hoe-handle smooth, where he gripped it, and there were callouses, he declared, an inch thick, on his palms. Within a week after the planting, the corn field showed long lines of light green, from the sprouting kernels; and Mr. Stanton told him that he soon must plough again and cross plough, to keep the weeds down and the soil stirred up. His mother also was busy. They both rose at dawn, had breakfast by half-past five, and were on

the go until dark. And even after dark his mother stitched and mended by the light of a candle.

The spring-house was yet to be built, and the dug-out cellar improved, and fences to be erected, and another supply of wood to be hauled, and the colt was getting wild and ought to be broken, and the chickens were wandering wide and laying eggs that never were found, and supplies were getting low, demanding a trip to town, and, oh, dear! The ranch was a problem. Not a word or sign had come from Mr. Richards, who was so sorely missed.

But the ranch certainly had improved, and these busy days were not unpleasant days. There was the corn-field, and there was the garden patch. The prairie grasses of the hay field were high and nodding, and waved in green billows as the daily wind swept across. Mr. Stanton estimated that at least 200 tons of hay were in sight—and Terry wondered how he was going to cut it and what he was going to do with it. The hens were laying well—they supplied far more eggs than could be eaten by two people; and besides, they were begining to rear broods. The big turkey had fully recovered from his wounds, except that he could not use his wing, and that he had a curious twist to his neck. He showed no inclination to return to the timber; on the contrary, he had become very tame—and likewise the boss of the yard. He occasionally entered the cabin, seeking tidbits; and outside he drove the rooster about as he pleased, and held the upper hand of even Shep. Terry named him Pete, and had taught him to come running at a peculiar little whistle.

Every morning the sun rose round and red, in a crimson east; shone all day, save when now and then a thunder-storm rolled up out of the north or west; and every evening he sank gorgeously, leaving a long, peaceful twilight or afterglow of pink and gold. The hayfield, and the creek banks, and even the timber, were brilliant with wild-flowers—pink and white and blue and yellow and red: thousands of them, in masses and ribbons, with the great sun-flowers towering highest, eight and ten feet tall. The very cabin roof was a flower-garden, in the midst of which a bunch of sun-flowers stood waving and bending, like a signal. When he returned homeward from work, Terry was always glad to see those sunflowers nodding at him, and his mother usually standing in the doorway under them, watching for him.

"Terry, boy," she said, suddenly, one night, "I think you'll have to go down to Manhattan or Fort Riley and get us some things we need."

"What, ma?"

"We're about out of flour, and bacon, and sugar, and soap, and potatoes, and, oh, lots of things. If your father could have been here, he might have managed different. I'm sure our timber is worth selling. He counted on selling wood and rails to the fort. But we'll have to take what money you've earned and what more we can spare, to spell us along till our garden's bearing and our hay and corn are ready. I wish we had a cow; then I could make butter."

"The Stantons give us milk, anyway," reminded Terry.

For the Stantons had a cow, and every other day Terry rode over for a bucket of milk.

"Yes, I know." And his mother sighed. "Maybe some day we can have a cow, too. Mrs. Stanton says the people at Manhattan and the fort pay good prices for butter; and you can always trade butter and cheese at the stores. Well, I think that to-morrow you'd better take what money we have to spend, and go into town. You can start early, and get back the next day, can't you?"

"You won't be afraid to stay alone?" queried Terry, anxiously.

His mother laughed.

"Of course not. Not with Shep and Pete."

"I'll leave you the gun, too," proffered Terry. "It's loaded."

"Don't you worry about me," smiled his mother. "Who'll try to harm us, in this big country? But you must hurry back, because I'll miss you."

Except for leaving his mother alone, willing indeed was Terry to go. It meant a sort of a vacation to him. He planned to start at sunrise—and to do this he rose extra early, so as to get the chores done. After a hasty breakfast of flapjacks (or griddle-cakes) and molasses, he mounted the mare, and with a good-by wave to his mother rode off. Shep, watching him, whined; and the colt, penned in the corral, whinnied shrilly; but they and Pete the turkey were to form the home guard to protect his mother.

He had in his pocket the ten dollars that he had earned by working for Mr. Stanton, and nine dollars

and a half that his mother had spared from the scanty household fund. And he carried three dozen eggs to be traded in. His mother had supplied him with a list of things to be bought—all of which were somehow to be packed on the mare and carried home.

It was five hours by saddle to either Manhattan town or the new government post of Fort Riley; but that was not much of a ride for a boy, and Terry loped blithely down the broad valley, dewy with the morning and sparkling in the beams of the newly risen sun. He saw smoke wafting from the chimney of the Stanton cabin, in the distance, as he passed by, climbing a little swell. However, he had no time to stop and tell George where he was going. Presently he had left the Stanton ranch behind.

The Blue River was on his left, marked by its line of timber. Manhattan was almost due south, with Fort Riley about eighteen miles west from it, up the Kansas River. He and his mother had decided that he would go to Riley first, and ask whether the government wouldn't buy the hay—for as anybody might know, the cavalry horses would require a lot of hay during the winter. Perhaps he could arrange to sell the government some potatoes and other garden stuff.

Then from Fort Riley he could return by way of Manhattan (where he would buy the stuff that his mother wanted), and up the Valley of the Blue.

It was fun to be riding off, full of business, like any man. At trot and lope he proceeded, with the prairie birds rising and fluttering around him, many flowers brushing his stirrups, the sun warm on his

back, and the breeze of plain and prairie blowing strong and sweet. At the same time, he had to be careful of his eggs.

By the sun he headed west of south, to cross the high rolling ridge which divided the Valley of the Blue from the Valley of the Republican, at the mouth of which lay Fort Riley. Broad stretched the Valley of the Blue, as he skirted it: a great expanse of rolling prairie, with quite a number of cabins scattered upon it—for the further south one went, toward the Kansas River and the emigrant trail along it, the more settlers there were. Antelope were grazing. Jiminy, but they could run! Yonder might be a bunch of buffalo—or perhaps they were cattle. And look at the deer—two, three, six, scampering off through the brush!

But Terry was business bent, and had no time to fool with small fry such as buffalo and deer—much less the countless long-eared, long-legged jack-rabbits that jumped from under the old mare's very hoofs. He could see a low line of mist, like a fog, far before, and rather guessed that this was the Kansas River. Finally he struck a wagon trail wending in the direction of Fort Riley, and gladly turned upon this.

It forded a creek, and amidst sumac and black walnut trees, wild plums and cherries ascended the opposite bank. On the mare Terry was emerging from the timber and rounding the shoulder of a grassy rise, when in a moment he was face to face with Thunder Horse, the small-pox marked Kiowa, a filthy blanket draped over his shoulders.

It was a meeting unexpected by Terry, but evi-

dently not unexpected by Thunder Horse. The Kiowa probably had been loafing at the side of the trail, for he appeared to have just mounted and was sitting his horse, waiting. He instantly reined his horse across the trail, and reaching to grasp the mare's bridle, grunted:

"How?"

His eyes were blood-shot, his breath was laden with the foul odor of liquor, and altogether he was a very unpleasing customer. But Terry did not propose to be caught and held. Even as the Kiowa's grimy fingers touched the cheek strap of the bridle, Terry jerked the mare's head sharply aside, and reined her back.

"Here! What are you trying to do?" he demanded. "Get out!"

Thunder Horse, his hand out-stretched, a crafty grin on his ugly face, pushed his pony forward, still intent on the mare's bridle.

"Huh! No pass. Give whisk'."

"Get out!" ordered Terry. "I haven't any whiskey—and I wouldn't give it to you if I had."

"Shoog," invited Thunder Horse. "No whisk'. Give shoog."

"Haven't any sugar, either," retorted Terry, backing, while the mare snorted. She did not like such an Indian, any more than did Terry. "Get out with you! Puck-a-chee!"

The Kiowa's face stiffened, and his reddened eyes narrowed.

"No pass," he repeated. "Give whisk'—shoog—tobac. Then boy go."

"I tell you I haven't any," insisted Terry, backing as fast as Thunder Horse advanced.

They were almost at the timber's edge, again, and he could not back much further without getting into a pocket. The mare was growing restive; but something in the Kiowa's watchful attitude let Terry know that his enemy was ready to head off a dash around to the left where the land was level.

"What got in bag?" asked Thunder Horse, edging on. He indicated the canvas sack in which the eggs were packed in grass. "Give."

"I'll show you what I've got in that bag," announced Terry, outwardly bold but inwardly alarmed.

He really did not know exactly what he was going to do, when he thrust in one hand while endeavoring to control his mare with the other. Thunder Horse was observing closely. One came Terry's hand—and with sudden hot resolution he let fly. He did it so quickly that he surprised even himself, but he surprised Thunder Horse more. The egg (it was a large one) landed better than if Terry had paused to take aim. First he saw the Kiowa's ugly, greasy, pitted face leering at him; next he saw it all streaming with the yellow yolk, for the egg had burst squarely on the low forehead.

"Wagh!" ejaculated Thunder Horse, clawing at his eyes, while his pony reared.

Terry seized the lucky chance. With a whoop he hammered his heels against the old mare's sides, and dashed past, in flight. Thunder Horse grabbed vainly at him, and wheeled in pursuit. Great Cæsar's ghost!

He was coming! Glancing back Terry saw him, his blanket dropped about his thighs, his face all smeared, his moccasined heels hammering *his* pony, pelting in pursuit. It was funny—his egged-up face made him look like a clown—but it was serious, too, for he seemed to be infuriated.

The fat old mare was no match for the wiry pony, in a race.

“Crickity!” sighed Terry, dubious over the result of his adventure.

The Kiowa was gaining rapidly. Terry extracted another egg, and turned in the saddle. At the motion Thunder Horse abruptly ducked. He had no liking for eggs served this way. Terry threw—and missed; but he quickly extracted a third egg and threw again, and hit the pony between the eyes. At the smash of the egg the pony tossed his head and swerved, almost unseating Thunder Horse, and Terry, an egg again in his hand, gained.

However, the Kiowa kept coming. Whenever he drew near, Terry threw at him; some of the eggs missed, but others struck—to smash on the Kiowa’s broad chest, and arms, and once right on his ear, and also on the pony’s breast and nose. Twice Thunder Horse arrived right along side—reached for the bridle rein—and missed it only because an egg found lucky mark on his scowling face, making him dodge as Terry veered away.

This could not last forever, though; the eggs wouldn’t, anyway. Now Terry had been chased off the trail and into the trackless prairie, and was

thoroughly frightened. The Kiowa was bound to catch him, eggs or no eggs; and then, what? But at this crisis—with Terry turning and twisting like a rabbit, and the Kiowa ducking and reaching like a hawk, and the fat mare blowing and the daubed pony apparently as relentless as its worse daubed master—a shrill cry rang high, through the breezy air. Across the prairie, from the direction of the trail a squad of horsemen were spurring to the fracas: soldiers—cavalrymen!

The Kiowa must have heard and seen, for with one final grunt and useless grab at the mare's bridle he wheeled about and bending low tore off at top speed. Terry steadied himself—threw his last egg, which he had been saving for an especially telling crack. It struck Thunder Horse right in the middle of the bare back, spattering him from shoulder to shoulder.

"You'd better get!" yelled Terry, after him.

The cavalry squad had spread out, as if to head off Thunder Horse; but he was fleeing in the opposite direction, and they did not have the slightest chance to catch him, and did not even shoot at him. With clatter of saber and carbine, and jingle of bridle, they drew in on Terry.

The first to arrive was a red-faced sergeant; he was grinning broadly—and grinning were all the men closing in behind and right and left.

"Faith!" grinned the sergeant. "An' eggs must be cheap where you come from, me lad. Niver did I see an Injun before in that kind av war-paint. How many did ye throw at him?"

"Three dozen," answered Terry, ruefully.

"Fresh wans?"

"Yes, sir—but I wish they hadn't been," asserted Terry.

"Haw, haw!" roared the sergeant. "'Tis an omelette ye made av him." And roared the tickled men. "An' what Injun was he?" asked the sergeant. "A Kiowa, I'm thinkin', by the cut av his hair."

"Yes, sir. He was Thunder Horse, a Kiowa; and he was drunk."

"That old rascal? The likes av him—attackin' a slip av a lad carryin' eggs to market! An' where might ye be a-goin', boy?"

"To Fort Riley. I thought maybe I could sell them our hay. It isn't ready yet, but it's growing on our ranch. And we'll have corn, too; and *potatoes*," answered Terry.

"An' where might the ranch be, then?" queried the sergeant.

"It's the last ranch up the Valley of the Blue," informed Terry. "We moved onto it only a month ago, but it's booming."

"An' be ye runnin' it?" asked the sergeant, his eyes twinkling.

He was a first sergeant, Terry knew, because he wore yellow chevrons with a lozenge in the angle of the three bars. He must be a veteran in the service, too; for his freckled face was parched to a deep maroon by the plains breezes, and his short bristly moustache was faded to a carrot yellow. He was a stocky, square-sitting little man—and one might have thought him fierce-looking were it not for his twinkling blue eyes.

"My mother and I are running it till my father comes back to help. We lost him, crossing a creek, but we've got his hat that was found on shore, so we know he's somewhere," declared Terry.

"Runnin' a ranch—the two av 'em!" gasped the sergeant. "A woman an' a boy the size av him! But he's wonderful with eggs—he's sheer wonderful. Hivin' help that Thunder Horse—he'll after be bathin' for the first time in all his dirty life!" The grizzled red-faced sergeant scratched his stubbly chin and surveyed Terry. "An' what's the name av you, me lad?" he inquired.

"Terry Richards."

"All right, Terry. I knew ye must be Irish. I'm Pathrick Murphy, top sergeant av the First United States Dragoons that they do be after callin' the cavalry. So come along, Terry me boy. We'll take ye over to Left'nant Arnold, yon; an' he'll take ye down to the fort, an' there ye'll see Captain Steuart, who be the quartermaster, an' the cap'n 'll engage the hay an' corn an' potatoes, but ye aren't out much loss on the eggs, for they be only tin cints the dozen, when I left; an' goin' beggin', at that. Now ride beside me, an' we'll talk it over."

The sergeant barked an order, the squad formed in file of twos, and at a trot they all rode for the trail—Terry beside Sergeant Murphy, at the head of the little column of dusty blue.

By the time that they reached the main cavalry detachment, waiting around the shoulder of the rise, the good-humored sergeant knew most of Terry's history.

"Belike, now," he sympathized, "your father was struck on the head an' his sinses knocked out av him so he forgot himself entirely, when he came to. But there'll be a day when he wakes, the same as out of a drame, an' yez do well to stay right where yez be, so he'll know where to find yez."

The half company of cavalry, about thirty men, was waiting, under command of a slim young lieutenant. The sergeant rode forward with Terry, to report.

"Yon's Left'nant Arnold," he whispered, hoarsely, to Terry. "An' a good officer an' gintleman, barrin' he's a bit new to the service as yit. I'll turn ye over to him."

He saluted the lieutenant, who with a quizzical smile surveyed Terry keenly.

"I've fetched you the boy, left'nant," said the sergeant. "But the Injun got away—an' sure, he was well plastered with eggs. The lad'll tell you all about it, sorr."

"Very well, sergeant," crisply responded the lieutenant. "Ride with me, my boy. Com'ny—'ten-*shun*! For'd—march! Trot!"

And away they went, down the wagon trail.

The lieutenant—who seemed to Terry not much older than himself—proved a very good listener, and was highly amused at the story of the egg throwing. He even slapped his thigh, and chuckled, and declared that eggs were cheaper than cartridges, and that he'd make a report to the War Department, on the new kind of ammunition. By the time that they came in sight of the fort, he was as well acquainted with Terry's history as was the Sergeant Murphy.

Fort Riley was located where the Republican River emptied into the Kansas River, west of the Blue River. It was not yet completed, but several stone buildings were already up, and others being built, grouped around a large parade ground, from the middle of which floated, on a tall pole, the Stars and Stripes. A well traveled and very dusty wagon-road led into it, along the Kansas—used by the emigrants and freighters from Kansas City, east, and the big Government freight outfits which entered it by a branch trail from Fort Leavenworth, northeast.

Stone-cutters were chipping, a saw-mill was in full blast, great freight-wagons were parked, ox-teams, of six and eight yoke, were standing, or pulling their canvas-covered wagons hither and thither, settlers and soldiers were strolling around; and altogether Fort Riley was a busy place.

The mess call for dinner was being sounded by a trumpeter, from the flag-pole base, when the cavalry detachment rode in. Terry, who was hungry, after putting his mare in along with the cavalry horses dined with the sergeant and the sergeant's red-armed Irish wife, in a little shanty where Mrs. Murphy evidently took in washing. But after dinner the sergeant conducted him to Lieutenant Arnold, and the lieutenant himself took him to see Captain Steuart the quartermaster.

As they crossed the parade ground, on their way to the quartermaster's office, Terry found himself regarded with smiling curiosity. Plainly enough, the story of the egg throwing had been widely circulated.

He felt somewhat like a hero, did Terry, albeit a little embarrassed. Anyhow, he had done the best he could, in emergency—and had it not been for the eggs, Thunder Horse surely would have *got* him.

Captain Steuart, also, smiled wisely on receiving him. He was a stalwart, broad-shouldered, weather-bronzed man with dark eyes and a black goatee. At the lieutenant's salute and presentation, the captain rose promptly and in elaborate manner shook hands.

"Proud to meet you, Mr. Richards," he asserted. "I understand you are the champion marksman with field artillery, and your shells never fail to explode, on impact."

"If you only might have seen that Indian, through the glasses, as I saw him," chuckled the lieutenant. "Henceforth his name is Big Omelette."

"How much hay have you in sight, my boy?" queried the captain, coming down to business.

"About two hundred tons, sir," answered Terry.

"Good!" approved the captain. "You can consider it engaged by the government—all or any part of it. Suppose you'll want to reserve some of it for your own stock. Very well. We'll say one hundred and fifty tons, delivered here, at the market price. If you can't deliver it, let me know. I'll make out the proper contract. Corn? Got corn? Potatoes?"

"Yes, sir. Twelve acres of corn, and I don't know how much potatoes."

"All right. We'll say sixty bushels of corn to the acre; that makes seven hundred bushels. You'll doubtless want half yourself. We'll take the rest. Fetch

along your potatoes, too. Any boy who can look out for himself the way you did deserves patronage. We need just that kind of settler out here. Now, if I can help you further to make that ranch a success, let me know. Got any timber?"

"Oh, yes, sir," stammered Terry. "A lot of it, down by the creek."

"What is it?"

"Black walnut, and cottonwood, and plums and hickory and oak, and some I don't know yet," informed Terry.

"Well, when you get ready to cut that timber, you figure it up," pursued Captain Steuart. "Maybe you can drive a bargain with us. We need lumber and fuel, same as anybody."

It all been so absurdly easy, that Terry went out quite dazed with his unexpected large contracts. Those eggs had not been wasted. Why, Captain Steuart had treated him as a man!

He was wild to get home and tell his mother; and decided to go right down to Manhattan, and make his purchases, and leave for the ranch early in the morning. If it wasn't for resting the mare, he might have planned to start on up that evening—but of course he ought not to try.

He said good-by to young Lieutenant Arnold, and was cinching the saddle on the mare in the stables, when Sergeant Murphy clanked in.

"An' are ye off?" queried the sergeant.

"Yes, sir; to Manhattan," busily answered Terry.

"Sure, then, I'll be glad av the comp'ny," responded

the sergeant. "'Tis where I'm after goin', meself."

Glad was Terry, likewise; and together they ambled out, and soon struck the dusty road leading down the course of the Kansas, for the town of Manhattan, some eighteen miles. The sergeant thought they ought to arrive in two hours and a half.

It was an interesting road, traveled constantly by emigrant outfits of wagons—all kinds—heavily laden with household goods, and drawn by horses and oxen and even cows, pushing on for new homes in the Valley of the Republican, above the fort; by freight trains of huge, covered wagons and long "bull" teams, accompanied by booted, red-shirted, whiskered "bull whackers," hauling settler and government supplies; and by numerous traders and hunters and adventurers, horseback or muleback; and by cavalvades of Indians, mainly Pottawattamies from the reservation down the river.

"Iverybody goin' west—an' always west," remarked the sergeant. "'Tis wonderful—fair wonderful. An' where'll they stop?"

"Does this road lead clear across the Rocky Mountains?" asked Terry.

"No, sorr. This is part of the government cut-off from Fort Leavenworth to join the trail to Santy Fee down south'ards. There be no road across the Rocky Mountains, save the Oregon Trail an' the Californy Trail, up the Platte River, to the north. But I hear tell there be a party formin' now, at Manhattan, to go on west to the mountains, sakin' for gold. I don't envy 'em. I was out there wance—twinty an' more

years ago, in Thirtyfive, with Colonel Henry Dodge an' the First Dragoons. We went out by the Oregon Trail, an' followed the mountains south, to the Arkansas River an' the Santy Fee Trail; an' it be no-man's country—jist desert an' rocks an' Injuns, with now an' then a creek for drinkin' an' a bit av grass for the horses."

"Did you see any gold?" asked Terry

"Niver a glimmer. Yes, an' I've been within sight of 'em many a time since, at Fort Laramie, an' at Bent's trading post av the south, an' I've talked with men who've been into 'em, an' there's mainly snow an' cold an' wild beasts; but niver yit have I seen a grain av gold from the Rocky Mountains. Gold comes from Californy."

They had ridden about half way to Manhattan, when they met a greater company of ox teams than any encountered before. There were seven wagons, drawn some by one yoke, some by two, the drivers trudging alongside the fore wheels, several men on horseback, and all proceeding under a cloud of dust. The riders were well armed, other guns could be seen sticking out from the wagons, and wedged against the outside of the wagon boxes were a number of picks and long-handled spades.

It did not look like an emigrant outfit, because there were no women and children; neither did the travelers look like hunters or traders. But evidently they were bound far.

The sergeant led around the straining, toiling, creaking column. As Terry followed, one of the horsemen

turned out slightly, almost in front of him, and dismounted to tighten his saddle cinch. Terry briefly halted, also, to watch a moment and ask some questions that were burning on his tongue: that is, ask them if he was given the chance.

The man briefly glanced at him, and continued to jerk at the strap under the horse's belly.

"Howdy?" ventured Terry. "Are you all going to California?"

"We're going to the mountains," answered the man, still busy.

He seemed to be a gentlemanly man—in fact, very pleasant, although he did not again glance up. He was clean shaven, with blue eyes, and hair cut close, and looked rather pale, as if he might have been ill, lately.

Something in his voice and the side of his face struck Terry as familiar—but he could not for the life of him remember where he had ever met this man before.

"To the Rocky Mountains, you mean?"

"Yes, young man; to the Rocky Mountains, for gold."

Terry was more and more puzzled. He certainly knew this man—or at least he had known some man similar to him. But where? And when? However, no time was granted to renew the acquaintance further, for the man had finished tightening the girth, and climbed into the saddle again.

"Good day to you, my boy," he bade, in a slow, even tone. And politely raising his hat in a salute trotted on.

Terry noted that in his close cropped hair was a long

bald spot; and that his full face, as he passed, was more familiar than his profile. And the voice! It had *such* a haunting tone to it.

Racking his brain, Terry also rode on, to overtake the sergeant. As he drew up alongside, suddenly an idea possessed him, and he stopped. Sergeant Murphy stopped.

"What's the matter now?" queried the sergeant.

"Did you see that man I was talking to?" demanded Terry, excitedly.

"I saw ye watchin' wan av them gold-seekers," admitted the sergeant.

"He was my father!" exclaimed Terry. "Anyway, I think he was my father. But he didn't look like him—he only sort of *felt* like him."

Sergeant Murphy wheeled his horse about and stared after the wagons.

"You don't say! An' did ye ask him?"

"No," replied Terry. "He didn't seem to know me, and he's so different I wasn't sure I knew *him*. He passed right on. You see, he didn't have any whiskers, and he was too thin, and his hair was too short——"

"He looked like a new-comer, to me," said the sergeant. "I marked him for that r'ason. Faith, an' what's to be done, if ye aren't sure, an' he doesn't know you. Could ye identify him by any special mark except gin'ral resemblance?"

"N—no," confessed Terry. "It's just—just—well, if I'd heard him and hadn't seen him—but I'm only pretty sure and can't prove anything."

"Well," declared the sergeant, rubbing his chin. "I dunno. He didn't know you, and ye can't make certain ye know him. There often be resemblances. There they go, anyhow—" for the horseman had galloped on ahead of the column, and were disappearing, "an' what's to be done? We might inquire at Manhattan, for the name av him, an' where he's from. Ye *aren't* sure?"

Terry shook his head.

"He's awfully different. Maybe he isn't—maybe I only met up with him somewhere, once. My mother'd know, though."

"Well," resumed the sergeant, "it's a pity she isn't here, then. That's the gold-huntin' party I was tellin' you about, you've been makin' ready at Manhattan to start for the Rocky Mountains. Green Russell's the captain av them, an' the most are from Georgy. He claims he saw gold at the foot av the Rockies, in Forty-nine, on his way to Californy; an' yon he goes, to find the gold again. It's a cruel trail he's bent on takin'—six hundred an' more miles across the desert. But we'll inquire about, at Manhattan, for the man who might be your father an' then mightn't."

CHAPTER X

TERRY FINDS A PARTNER

THEY arrived at the town of Manhattan before sunset. The first thing they did was to inquire around, as the sergeant had promised, about the make-up of the Green Russell party of gold seekers.

Yes, the party had been formed here. Green Russell was from Leavenworth; he had brought with him to Manhattan a dozen other men, mainly of Georgia, and had been joined by half a dozen more. They expected to meet thirty or forty Cherokee Indians and Missourians, on the way to the mountains, and all were going to look for gold. Green Russell's wife was a Cherokee woman; that was why so many of the Cherokees had enlisted.

The thin-faced, smooth-shaven man was a stranger by the name of Jones. He had said he was from Kansas City and had been sick. He had not mentioned any family; but he had proved to be handy with tools, and had bought a horse and gun and had gone with the gold seekers. From Fort Riley the party were to strike out into the desert, and make their own trail down to the Santa Fe Trail, and travel on out to the mountains that way.

"If he said his name was Jones, mebbe Jones it be,"

reasoned the sergeant, to the puzzled Terry. "Or mebbe he thinks it is Jones, an' it be Richards. I dunno. You think you know him—an' again you think you know some other man resemblin' him. Sure, at any rate, if he's your father, he's alive an' well, barrin' forgettin' himself; an' like as not he'll dig a fortune yonder an' come back to yez an' yez'll all be happy wance more together. Ye'll do better, I'm thinkin', to go home to your mother who needs you, rather'n be settin' off on a wild-goose chase after a man who doesn't need you an' might not feel plazed to be called 'father' by a lad he doesn't know.

Terry took the advice. It would have been great to bring his father home with him! What a time they all would have had! But, shucks, Mr. Jones might not agree to come; he might decline to be adopted, and he might not be the right man, after all. So Terry gave up his notion of setting out after the gold-seeker company, and decided that he ought to return to his mother as quick as he could. She was alone, and Thunder Horse might be making her trouble, and the ranch demanded attention, and he was full of news for her; and he ought to complete his errands and hurry back.

Manhattan was a bustling little town of about 150 inhabitants, nicely located near where the Big Blue River emptied into the Arkansas River. There were a saw-mill, and a couple of stores, and many settlers and freighters and reservation Indians—Pottawatamies, Osages, Kansas, Shawnees, and others, begging and visiting—and a few of the soldiers from Fort Riley.

Terry hustled to make his purchases, before dark, and to be ready to start for the ranch early in the morning. The sergeant had business of his own; and Terry was tugging at his sack of flour, to drag it to the pile he was building in the stable where the old mare was stalled, when a young man offered to help him.

"Better give me an end of that sack, and we'll tote it together," spoke the young man.

He was a slightly framed, bright faced young man, with laughing brown eyes and a long chin, and a clear, tanned complexion. He wore "store" clothes of dusty blue worsted, a gray flannel shirt and red tie, on his feet coarse heavy shoes and on his shapely head a flapping brimmed black slouch hat.

"All right—I'll be mighty glad of a lift," accepted Terry—for nobody in all the crowd seemed to have the time to help a boy.

"Where to?" asked the young man, taking an end of the sack.

"Down to the Happy Home stables, where my horse is," answered Terry. "I'm putting things there, to have 'em ready in the morning."

"You must be head of a family, by the way you're working," laughed the young man, panting as they lugged the sack—and Terry noted that he moved with a limp. "Now, where you from and where you going—as people say, out in this country?"

"My mother and I've got a ranch up the Big Blue Valley," proudly informed Terry. "I'm down here buying supplies, but I'm going home to-morrow, early."

"You are, are you? Traveling alone?"

"Yes, sir."

"Can you find your way?"

"Of course. It's only about five hours."

"Aren't you afraid of Indians or buffalo?"

"No," scoffed Terry. "Haven't seen many buffalo. They're getting scared out. But I met an Injun, named Thunder Horse, and when he tried to stop me because he was drunk I pelted him with eggs. Now his name's Big Omelette!"

The young man threw back his head and laughed.

"You did!" he chuckled. "Good for you! But what's your name? Mine's Harry Revere. I'm from Virginia."

"Mine's Terry Richards," responded Terry. "I used to be from Ohio, but now I live in Kansas."

They had reached the stable. Mr. Revere thoughtfully surveyed the potatoes and other stuff, to which was added the flour.

"How do you expect to carry all this?" he queried. "On one horse?"

"I guess so," asserted Terry, but rather doubtful, himself. "Maybe I'll have to walk."

"I'll tell you, Terry," proposed Mr. Revere. "I'm going up that way, and if you don't object to company we'll start together. I've got a horse and can spell you with your load. What do you say?"

"Good," agreed Terry.

"All right. Where are you stopping for the night?"

"Here," explained Terry—a little sheepish. "The livery man said I could sleep in the manger and he

wouldn't charge me, except for the horse. I haven't money enough for hiring a bed."

"Neither have I," declared Mr. Revere, promptly. "You see, I'm a school teacher, and scholars are scarce. Any chance for a school, your way?"

Terry stared.

"I don't know," he faltered. "We're all busy. I suppose, though, there'll be a school sometime."

"Of course there will," asserted Mr. Revere. "Nobody can civilize a country without schools. Education is the only difference between a white man and a savage. But we won't argue that out, now. You've found a place to sleep, you say; so I must find a place. That manger's not big enough for two, is it? How about the other mangers, I wonder."

"They're engaged," faltered Terry. "So's the hay-loft—but it's just for women so they won't smoke and set it afire. The town's awfully full of people, isn't it?"

"Packed," said Mr. Revere. "Let's see. Do you think we *could* both squeeze into that manger? It's pretty good size."

"We could try," invited Terry.

"I might sit up with my legs out, and you could sit in front of me and use me as a pillow," mused Mr. Revere. "Well, we'll do our best. But it's your manger, anyway. Have you had supper?"

"Yes, sir."

"So've I. I washed dishes first, to pay for it, at the hotel. I'm a first-rate dish washer. Washed my own dishes, which numbered a knife, fork, two spoons,

a plate, a tin cup, and a sauce pan, all through college. Graduated from William and Mary College only last year. Now, are you all done purchasing?"

"I've just a couple of things to buy, but I can carry them. They won't weigh much," responded Terry.

"All right. I've an errand or two, myself. Supposing we finish our business and then meet here, for the night."

They walked out together, and separated to attend to their affairs. Terry spent the last of his money, that he had been reserving because he deemed it was better spent this way than on merely a night's lodging, and was turning back to the stable, when in the dusky, dusty street a crowd and a loud voice attracted him.

A circle of laughing, curious men had formed at the entrance to a so-called "grocery" where the principal goods sold were liquor. They surrounded two figures; and as Terry wriggled through, for a view, he saw that the two figures were Mr. Revere and a large, shaggy whiskered, coarse voiced man, who in huge cow-hide boots, sagging jeans trousers, and heavy red flannel shirt, topped by a flaring ragged hat, from under which his hair stuck out all around, was a very unpleasant figure. He appeared to be abusing Mr. Revere, who stood quietly before him.

"I air askin' you to step inside to the bar, stranger, an' liquor up with me," was rasping the shaggy ruffian.

"Thank you, but as I have already said, I do not care to drink," replied Mr. Revere, coolly.

"Yes, you do; for I'm askin'. I air Ike Chubbers.

Pine Knot Ike they call me whar I come from, on account my bein' so drefful tough. I air the only man that ever roped an' rid an alligator. I air half wil' hoss an' half grizzily b'ar. Now, stranger, do you feel a leetle more like drinkin'?"

"No, sir," answered Mr. Revere, still coolly. "I never have felt like it and I never shall. In fact, I'm down-right opposed to liquor at any time and in any shape."

The shaggy man swelled angrily, and glared down upon Mr. Revere, who reached scarcely to his shoulders and weighed not much more than half of him.

"You air! Bound to pick a quarrel with me, air you? I'm powerful slow to wrath, stranger, an' toller'ble easy to throw, but I tell you, you shall drink with me."

"And I tell you, sir, I won't," retorted Mr. Revere, a little pale.

The shaggy man leaped into the air, as if working himself to fury; and held his clenched fist under Mr. Revere's nose.

"Stranger," he bellowed, "you air crowdin' me. I leave it to these gentlemen hyar if I'm not the easiest-goin', peacefulest man that ever bit ary nail in two. But you air crowdin' me. You air pickin' a fight with me. You air too fresh from the East, an' you think you can bully me because I air peaceable." And with amazing rapidity the shaggy man had whipped from the bosom of his half-open shirt an enormous horse-pistol and had thrust it right against little Mr. Revere's nose—where a moment before his clenched, hairy fist

had been. "Now, stranger," he continued, loudly, "if you *will* impose on me, an' air bound to have it so, I'll jest let you know that my wrath is riz, an' if you don't step inside with me I'll natterly lift the top of your head off with this hyar pea-shooter."

Terry's heart choked him. Were all the crowd going to stand idly and let that big ruffian abuse poor Mr. Revere. But nobody made a move. Everyone seemed to enjoy the quarrel forced by the big man. As for Mr. Revere, he withdrew his nose not an inch. He paled, slightly, his nostrils twitched, but he stayed fast, gazing steadily along the pistol barrel, at the shaggy man.

"Mr. Chubbers," he said, "I am entirely unarmed, and you have all the advantage. I do not wish to fight, and I do not wish to be murdered in cold blood. I know your character, and assume that you will shoot. Accordingly, if you *make* me, I shall have to accept your invitation and step inside with you."

"For a tenderfoot, you show a heap of sense, stranger," commented Mr. Chubbers.

A snigger spread through the crowd. Mr. Chubbers barely turned his head aside, to wink. But that instant of off guard was enough for Mr. Revere. Up flashed both his hands, he sprang from the muzzle, and with a single vigorous jerk and twist he had wrested the pistol from the astonished Pine Knot Ike—who in a twinkling found himself staring into the muzzle, himself.

"Now, Mr. Chubbers," drawled Mr. Revere, panting, a little smile on his lips, "we are more even. In

fact, I am bigger than you are. I will explain that while I never drink liquor, I'm very fond of dancing, and I'm sure these other gentlemen are, too. Will you oblige the company with a little exhibition? I hear a fiddler inside. Somebody send for him, please."

"Stranger, I do not keer to dance. I air no dancer," stammered Mr. Chubbers, held spell-bound by the unwavering pistol.

"Exactly what I said about drinking," accused Mr. Revere, easily. "My name is Harry Revere, and I am very stubborn—more stubborn than a pine knot. Here comes the fiddler, and I insist that you dance."

"I tell you, I never dance," protested Mr. Chubbers, very *un*-easily. "It air ag'in my principles."

"Sir," demanded Mr. Revere, his voice rising in sudden sternness, "you *shall* dance. Strike up a double shuffle, fiddler, so Mr. Chubbers can get his cue. Let us have a little more room, gentlemen."

The fiddler, a darky widely a-smile, put his fiddle to his chin and scraped away. Mr. Chubbers gave an appealing glance around, for sympathy (which he did not find), glared at the pistol muzzle, and began to move his heavy feet.

"Faster, Mr. Chubbers," bade Mr. Revere.

Inspired by the rollicking strains of the fiddle, Mr. Chubbers increased his pace. He became quite jaunty, and raising the dust, executed a double-shuffle—and, now grinning as the crowd clapped and cheered, performed a series of leaps and pigeon-wings.

"Stop, Mr. Chubbers," suddenly ordered Mr. Revere, also laughing. "That will do nicely." And Pine

Knot Ike immediately stopped stock still. "I had no intention of picking a quarrel with you, and I have none now. You picked on me, and you know it. Here is your pistol. I have not even a pen-knife, and you are much the larger. If you wish to murder an unarmed man, there is nothing to prevent you."

In subdued, uncertain fashion Mr. Chubbers cautiously accepted his pistol, and backed away. He examined the pistol, and slowly tucked it into his shirt bosom again.

"Stranger," he said, huskily, "you air all right. For a tenderfoot an' a school master, you air somewhat of a hoss yourself. I reckon you air a heap bigger'n you look. Shake."

He extended his large hairy hand; Mr. Revere shook.

"As it air powerful late an' I have a heap of travel-in' to do, I reckon now I'll be goin' on," remarked Mr. Chubbers, apologetically; and as he retired, the crowd opened for him.

"The entertainment is finished, gentlemen," announced Mr. Revere, with a bow. "Hello, Terry. Let's go to bed."

Slipping his arm through Terry's he conducted him away, while the good-natured throng again clapped and cheered.

"Would you have shot him?" asked Terry, excited.

"Not much!" laughed Mr. Revere. "The pistol wasn't cocked! The hammer fell on my thumb as I grabbed it. See?" And he showed his thumb, bleeding where the hammer had landed.

"Would he have shot *you*, though?" asked Terry.

"I didn't wait to see," laughed Mr. Revere. "I'd made up my mind what to do."

"He's an awful big fellow," hazarded Terry.

"Well," mused Mr. Revere, tightening his arm in Terry's, "you can't always tell a man's size by the outside of him."

They slept this night in the manger. That is, they started to sleep there, together, much to the astonishment of the old mare. Mr. Revere climbed in first, and sat down, half leaning back against the end, his legs outstretched. Terry sat between his knees, and leaned back against his arm. They pulled the hay around them. Really, to Terry it was very comfortable. His feet were under the feed box, and his head was in the hollow of Mr. Revere's shoulder.

"Great, isn't it!" enthused Mr. Revere. "Got room enough?"

"Lots," assured Terry, drowsily. "Have you?"

"Oceans of it," asserted Mr. Revere.

From other mangers snores were gurgling. Terry dozed off. He was glad of the feel of Mr. Revere, who held him warmly and firmly. Such company was nice to have, in the darkness.

But when he awakened, in the daylight, Mr. Revere was gone. For a moment Terry could not conceive where he was, himself: here in a narrow box—covered with hay—his head pillowed, and the mare staring in at him and gingerly nibbling the hay. Oh, yes; the manger. And the pillow was Mr. Revere's coat, carefully folded and well placed. But what had become of the owner?

As Terry sat up, in alarm, and the mare snorted protest, Mr. Revere's smiling face peered in at him.

"Hello, Terry. Ready for business?"

"Yes, sir. But where've you been? Didn't you sleep in the manger?" demanded Terry.

"Certainly I did," claimed Mr. Revere. "Don't you remember how we started off, snug as two bugs in a rug? But you see, Terry, my legs wanted to get up, and the mare wanted to eat; and as I'm an early riser I thought I'd be accommodating to all concerned. So I've been viewing the scenery. It's a beautiful morning."

He seemed rather worn, did Mr. Revere, with dark circles under his brown eyes. But he looked and spoke so honestly, that Terry dared not dispute him. Not for several years did Terry learn, from his mother, that Mr. Revere had stood the cramps in his legs just as long as he could, until about midnight he had gently slipped away, and had folded his coat for Terry's pillow, and had spent the rest of the night walking about, to keep warm.

"I've brought my horse in," continued Mr. Revere, cheerfully. "We'll saddle up and tie our stuff on, and wash at the river; then we'll eat a cold snack that I happen to have, and ride like regular Don Cossacks with their plunder."

"Will you go clear to the ranch with me?" asked Terry, expectantly.

"If you ask me hard enough, I might," said Mr. Revere, flushing. "I'm merely looking 'round."

"And will you stay there?" demanded Terry.

"Haven't any other place, have you? I need another man—and you can sleep up in the loft with me."

"N-no, I haven't any other place, special," confessed Mr. Revere. "But who's the boss, on that ranch? You, or your mother? She might not like to have such sudden company?"

"I guess she's the boss," admitted Terry. "But you won't be company. You can teach me, nights, and days we'll plow and go fishing and hunt buffalo and deer and panthers. And rattlesnakes, too; there are heaps of rattlesnakes."

"Rattlesnakes?" mused Mr. Revere. "I kept hearing a rattlesnake all night. Think there must be one under this manger."

"Aw," said Terry, blushing, "that's something I'm wearing, 'round my neck. It's a brotherhood sign. George Stanton wears one like it. He's the other brother."

"This sounds very interesting," acknowledged Mr. Revere. "I believe I'll ride up with you, at any rate, and see what's going on."

"All right," cried Terry, heartily glad, and tumbling out. "Maybe we'll meet Thunder Horse on the way."

"But we haven't any eggs," laughed Mr. Revere.

CHAPTER XI

THE PARTNER GETS BUSY

At this moment a prolonged "Hee-haw! Hee-haw! Hee-ha-aw-aw-aw!" from outside the stable seemed to summon them.

"You will observe," quoth Mr. Revere, "that my horse has an unusual voice. And presently I shall ask you to admire her beautiful ears. I judge by her song that she's getting impatient."

He led out.

"Her name is Jenny," he said, over his shoulder.

And that was a very proper name, for his "horse" proved to be a large, raw-boned, yellow mule. At sight of her master, Jenny pricked her extensive ears, and "Hee-hawed" again. She bore a disreputable looking saddle, to which one stirrup was fastened by hide thongs. The leather of the tree had been patched with cow-hide, hair out, and the horn, or pommel, had been broken off and capped, also, with the red cow-hide. As for the bridle, that, likewise, was a thing of pieces.

But Mr. Revere appeared not a whit apologetic.

"Jenny is not pretty, but she loves me," he stated.

"Does she ride easy?" queried Terry. "Some mules ride easier than a horse."

"And some don't," responded Mr. Revere, drily. "Jennie is a creature of two minds. Her hinder half is eager and willing, but her front half is very deliberate; and when they meet in the middle, she rather hunches up. That is where I sit, as judge and jury, and the two halves fight it out under me. But," he added, stroking Jenny's nose while she blissfully closed her eyes, "Jenny loves me, and she rarely bites."

Terry saddled his mare; and he and Mr. Revere loaded the supplies aboard the horse and the yellow mule, tied fast sacks and all, then mounted, themselves.

At the river they washed and ate the cold snack provided by Mr. Revere, and were ready to start.

"Supposing," proffered Mr. Revere, as they headed up the valley, for "home", "that you call me Harry, and see how I like it. Jenny tries, but she has great difficulty in pronouncing. She says 'Hee-haw-ry.' How do you say it?"

"Harry," promptly demonstrated Terry.

"Well done," praised Mr. Revere. "I like it first-rate."

So, gaily chatting, Terry and his new partner Harry rode up the green sparkling Valley of the Big Blue, in Kansas Territory of May, 1858.

Yes, the yellow mule certainly had an odd gait, in both trot and lope. Her legs were long and loose; and whereas the hind pair reached forward the front pair held back, so that betwixt the two Mr. Revere was constantly bounced up and down. He did not seem to mind.

They did not meet any Thunder Horse, but because

of their loads and their chatting they spent rather more than the five hours on the trip, and not until almost noon did they arrive in sight of the ranch cabin.

"See it?" bade Terry. "This is the ranch, and there's the house."

He quickened the pace of the fat mare, who, nothing loth to greet her waiting colt, broke into a lope. The yellow mule, with long ears juttet forward, humped beside. Mr. Revere's eyes roved over the pleasant landscape.

"It looks like a right good piece of land," he commented.

"And there," triumphantly announced Terry, "is my mother, in the doorway. She's expecting me."

"That," declared Mr. Revere, "is the best sight of all."

Everything appeared to be peaceful and serene. Terry felt as though he had been gone a great while, for much had happened to him. He waved to his mother, and she waved back, and peered, as if she were a bit astonished to see him arriving with company.

Now Shep ran forward barking, to protect her—but he speedily changed his note when he recognized Terry and the mare. The colt whinnied, the mare answered, Pete the turkey gobbled, the sun-flowers on the sod roof nodded, the garden stuff certainly had grown a foot in the thirty hours—and reining his mare at the cabin door, Terry on a sudden was in his mother's arms.

"Oh, but I'm glad to see you!" she exclaimed, hugging him. "Did you get everything?"

"Looks like it, doesn't it?" bubbled Terry. "I

spent all our money and slept in a manger, and I met old Thunder Horse and had to throw the eggs at him but they aren't worth much, anyway, and the man at the fort promised to take our hay and potatoes and timber—every bit; and, ma, I think I saw father, but he didn't know me and maybe it wasn't he, and he's gone on out to the mountains; and I brought a partner—see? He slept in the manger with me, and he'll teach me sums nights and help farm, days. Can he stay, ma?"

After hearing such a rattle of words Terry's mother gazed rather bewildered upon Mr. Revere; whereupon he dismounted from his yellow mule, and gallantly removed his dusty hat.

"I am Harry Revere, madam," he introduced himself. "Late of Virginia. Terry and I met up, at Manhattan, and as he had quite a load I engaged to ride along with him, on his way, and see what the prospects are for a school, in this section. I am a school-teacher. However, I have no thought of intruding upon you; and now with Terry safely landed, I will ride on."

"No, indeed you won't, sir," protested Terry's mother. "You will stay to dinner, at least."

"Yes, and he'll stay all night and sleep up in the loft with me, and he'll keep staying on maybe forever; won't he, mother?" pleaded Terry.

Mr. Revere laughed.

"Terry seems bent on making large contracts," he said. "But I will stay to dinner, with pleasure, and thank you, madam. Let's unpack our noble steeds, Terry."

They unpacked the mare and the mule, carried the

stuff inside, and put the animals in the corral, while Mrs. Richards bustled getting dinner.

It was a lively meal, for Terry had much to recount. His mother agreed that he had done very well—and also that “Mr. Jones” *might* have been his father. She was sure that she would have known. At any rate, they could still believe that he was alive, and would return to them. This was some comfort. And she did not mind the loss of the eggs; she thought that they had been used to good purpose, and that Terry had been smart, to defend himself so handily.

Now, with the fort ready to take whatever they could produce, the ranch work loomed more important than ever.

“If Mr. Revere *wishes* to stay with us——,” ventured Terry’s mother, looking at the school teacher for answer. “Until he finds something better. We can’t pay him, but we will share and share alike.”

“All I ask is a share in your home, Mrs. Richards.” And Terry thought that Mr. Revere’s eyes filled up. “If you’ll let me play second fiddle to Terry I’ll milk the cows——”

“But we haven’t any cow, yet,” interrupted Terry.

“Well, milk the chickens, then; and curry the oxen and——”

“Oh, shucks!” cried Terry. “Weren’t you ever on a farm before?”

“And climb for potatoes and plow the pumpkins and hay——”

“Oh, you’re joking!” accused Terry. “Nobody plows *hay*!”

"Well, I mean I'm willing to do anything, possible or not," explained Mr. Revere, "if a home is attached to it. I haven't had a home for some years, and to me a home is the greatest prize on earth."

"There isn't any 'homier' home than this," loyally asserted Terry. "Except that my father isn't here—but he will be."

So it was arranged that Mr. Revere should stay, and should be one of the family, until he wanted to leave.

"I declare," sighed Mrs. Richards. "I'm as glad as Terry is. We certainly need another man."

And that was just what Terry had said.

"Supposing," quoth Mr. Revere, after dinner, "that Terry shows me over the farm. Then I can know what to do first, to earn my keep."

Eager to do so was Terry. He proudly exhibited the spring——

"Ought to clean that out, cover it over, and lead it down to the house," remarked Mr. Revere.

And the panther skin——

"We'll have to watch out for her mate," remarked Mr. Revere.

And the garden——

"Needs a little hoeing, doesn't it?" remarked Mr. Revere. "The weeds might object but the potatoes wouldn't, and it's time the things were hilled, most of them."

And the corn field.

"First class," commended Mr. Revere.

And the hay field——

"That ought to run two tons to the acre," asserted

Mr. Revere. "You've got about 100 acres, haven't you?"

And from a distance the timber patch——

"There's where we get our fence rails," jubilated Mr. Revere. "Also shingles. Did you ever split rails?"

"You seem to know a lot about farming," hazarded Terry, admiringly.

"Just a little," admitted the modest Mr. Revere—who did not look at all like a farmer. "I'm a school-master, but I was raised on a farm."

"I think," he uttered, reflectively, as they walked back toward the house, "that the first thing to do is to put in some oats. We can break that meadow next to the corn. Had you figured on oats?"

"Not yet," confessed Terry, somewhat aghast at the prospect of more plowing. "You see, I haven't had time."

"You'll need oats, for the horses; and you can sell them to the fort, too; and the straw will come in mighty handy, this winter, for bedding the animals and filling your mother's ticks. And next we ought to bring the spring water down close to the house, so your mother will have it handy."

"All right," agreed Terry.

They paused at the corral, to stake the mare out, to graze. The colt accompanied her.

"And after breaking the meadow and tending to the spring, we ought to break that colt," resumed Mr. Revere. "He's big enough to help on this ranch—the lazy rascal."

That very afternoon Mr. Revere set himself at work plowing the meadow for oats. It was high time that they were put in. A sack of oats had been brought out along with the other supplies, from Ohio, so Terry's father evidently had planned to plant some.

Terry tackled the garden, with a hoe. George, with Virgie behind his saddle, rode over, during the afternoon.

"Who's that?" he asked, pointing toward the plowman.

"He's my partner," answered Terry, proudly. "His name's Harry Revere. He's from Virginia, but I met him down at Manhattan and he's going to stay and help on the ranch and teach me sums nights, because he's a school teacher."

"Aw, shucks!" derided George. "A school teacher! You stay here, Virgie. I want to see how straight he can plow."

Off loped George. He and Mr. Revere talked together for a few minutes; then Mr. Revere resumed his plowing and George came back.

"He's not very big, is he! But he can plow. Those furrows are as straight as anybody's. I guess he's all right. He said he'd teach Virgie and me, too, any time we wanted to come over."

"Of course he's all right," retorted Terry.

"Did you have any fun on your trip? We heard you'd gone."

"I should say I did. Had an egg fight with Thunder Horse, and ate with the top sergeant at the fort, and met some gold seekers going to the mountains and one

of them might be my father, and slept all night in a manger, and—but wait, I'll tell you." So he did.

George and Virgie were much impressed.

"You ought to have rattled your rattle at Thunder Horse," advised George.

"He was more afraid of eggs than he would have been of any rattle," laughed Terry. "But Mr. Revere heard the rattle, when we were in the manger, and he thought it was a sure 'nough snake."

"Did it scare him?"

"Don't believe so. He's not the scary kind. You ought to have seen how he handled that big bully at Manhattan—Pine Knot Ike." And Terry told that, also.

"I guess he *is* all right," declared George. "Maybe we'll admit him into our clan. But first he'll have to kill a snake with thirteen rattles."

Presently George and Virgie galloped away, to carry their news home.

Mr. Revere finished the plowing of the oat patch the next day, while Terry rode the drag, drawn by the yellow mule. The five acres having been cleared, Mr. Revere harrowed the ground, and Terry scattered the oats. When these were harrowed in, the job was done—and well done, too. Assuredly, having a partner made a big difference.

Terry's mother was relieved to have the oats in at last, but she was more pleased when her "two men", as she called them, "moved the spring" for her. The spring was located half way up a little rise, behind the cabin. First the spring was cleaned out, into basin

shape, and lined with rocks and pebbles from the creek. Mr. Stanton had hauled a load of lumber from Manhattan, and enough planks were borrowed to make a trough—Terry and Mr. Revere engaging to trade labor for them. Mr. Revere cleverly hollowed out a pithy elder branch, for a spigot, and stuck it through the side of the barrel. Then the trough, of planks nailed and pegged together by the edges, at right angles (with tin covering their end joints) was laid on sticks crossed scissors shape to lift it out of the way of the chickens, from the spring basin to the top of the barrel. It overflowed through the elder-wood spigot, so at any time Mrs. Richards could set a pan or pail under the spigot and did not have to dip.

The waste water was carried by a trench to the edge of the garden, and Mr. Revere figured that in a dry spell they could flow the water right into the garden! Besides, the chickens drank out of the trench instead of trying to drink out of the trough.

Over the top of the barrel was spread a gunny sack, and Mrs. Richards tied a piece of muslin across the end of the trough, to strain out dirt. It was not a large spring. The barrel remained just so full, the water was cold, and although the trough leaked some until it swelled tight, the new arrangement was voted to be bully.

One queer thing was noted, later, about that spring. It never froze, even in the coldest weather.

“The next thing,” remarked Mr. Revere, at supper, “we ought to break that colt. He’s old enough to be taught his manners, and how to be useful. He just

laughs, now, whenever he sees the rest of us working."

"But who'll do it, Harry?" queried Mrs. Richards.

Harry Revere thoughtfully scratched his nose.

"I'll try," he said.

"But you have that lame foot, you know," reminded Mrs. Richards.

"In Virginia, Mother Richards, ma'am," proclaimed Mr. Revere, "we are taught to ride with our legs and not with our feet. Anyway, the colt has to be broken. Then Terry can have him, I'll have the mule, and you can visit the neighbors on the old mare!"

"Did you ever break a colt?" demanded Terry.

"Never did," admitted Mr. Revere. "But down South when I wasn't more than half your size I've ridden them before they were broken—I and the pick-aninnies. We used to run races."

In the morning, after breakfast, they were surveying the colt, in the corral, preparatory to starting in on him, when a strange man rode up. He was a leathery-complexioned, long-haired Mexican, evidently, under an enormous peaked sombrero; wearing a gay cherry-colored shirt, tight black velvet trousers slashed with yellow, and on his heels spurs six inches in diameter. His little pony was almost hidden by the saddle, and the curb bit of the jingling bridle was oozing bloody froth.

But the Mexican sat easily, while his pony tossed its tortured head.

"Buenos dias (Good day), señors," he accosted. He noted the colt, and the rope in Mr. Revere's hand. "Mebbe you got hoss to brek; si? I brek heem."

"Horse breaker, are you?" replied Mr. Revere.

The Mexican flashed his white teeth in a smile.

"Si, si. One dollar. Brek hoss, one dollar. Any hoss, one dollar. My beez'ness—hoss buster. Ride ever'where, brek hosses."

"Better let him do it, Harry," called Mrs. Richards, from the cabin doorway.

"But a dollar's an awful lot of money."

"But I'd rather pay it than have you or Terry hurt. That would be worse. He's a professional, he says, and he'll know how."

"Humph!" murmured Mr. Revere, scratching his nose—a favorite habit when he was ruminating.

"I brek heem?" eagerly invited the Mexican.

"Go ahead. How long will it take?"

"Not long. I brek heem queek. I show heem." And the Mexican was off his pony in an instant, dropped his lines to the ground, and began to take down his hair rope.

"What do you calculate to do?" questioned Mr. Revere.

"Ketch heem with rope, throw down, tie hees eyes, put on saddle an' bridle; he run, I ride—bueno. No let heem quit." And coiling his hair rope over his shoulder, the Mexican began to loosen the saddle cinch.

"Wait a minute," bade Mr. Revere. "You catch him with that rope by the neck and choke him till he tumbles over; si?"

"Si, si!" nodded the Mexican.

"Then somebody sits on his head while you blind-fold him."

"Si, señor."

"You put that saddle on him and turn him over and strap it tight."

"Si."

"Going to use that bit, are you?"

"Si. Fine bit. He get mad, 'mos' bust hees jaw."

"So you force that bit into his mouth and that bridle over his head. Going to use those spurs, too?"

"Si, si. When he get tired, spur mek heem jump." The saddle was stripped off, and off came the bridle. Terry saw that the bit was crooked, in the middle, with a square 'U;' and that the cross-piece forming the bottom of the 'U' was set with a little disk; when the bridle lines were pulled, this 'U' turned bottom up, and forced the horse's jaws open while the disk cut into the roof of his mouth.

"Not by a long shot!" suddenly exclaimed Mr. Revere. "First you frighten the animal out of all his senses, while he's helpless, then when he resists you torture him till he drops. That 'breaks' him—and I don't wonder. No, sir; we'll tend to this colt ourselves."

"Oh, I'd rather have him never touched at all, than broken that way," voiced Terry's mother. "When I said I'd pay, I'd no idea——!"

Terry had viewed the preparations aghast. The cruel bit and spurs rather took the breath out of him. The Mexican, who had understood only that objections were being made, stared puzzled. Mr. Revere, his rope in his hand, promptly entered the corral.

"We'll break the colt to be useful," he declared;

"but we won't break his heart. We'll make a horse of him, not a machine."

"Don't you need a saddle and bridle, Harry?" called Mrs. Richards.

"Not yet. How'd you like to wake up with a saddle strapped 'round you and a bridle on your face?" challenged Mr. Revere.

He limped straight to the colt, who pricked his ears and sidled about his interested mother. But he was a tame colt, and accustomed to petting. Mr. Revere spoke soothingly to him, patted his flank, and slowly slipped a hand along until it smoothed the colt's velvety nose. Gently, gently, he changed the rope noose to that hand, opened it on his arm, and with even movement transferred it to the colt's neck.

"Come on, boy," he bade, with a final pat; and in matter-of-fact way led the colt about the corral. The colt pulled and danced a little, but he followed; whenever he did pull, Mr. Revere yielded, and waited, coaxing him.

"Open the bars, Terry," ordered Mr. Revere. "And stand aside, everybody."

He succeeded in coaxing the colt out, while the mother whinnied anxiously.

"We'll be back, old lady," assured Mr. Revere.

CHAPTER X

HARRY RIDES THE COLT

HARRY spent several minutes experimenting, stroking the colt on the nose, and patting his shoulders and side, until the colt, although trembling and suspicious, suffered an arm to be laid across his back.

Harry leaned harder, and slowly left the ground. On a sudden he was aboard. Terry held his breath, his mother uttered a little exclamation of anxiety, the Mexican, stock-still, gazed curiously—the colt shrank, under the weight, snorted, and while Mr. Revere spoke and patted his neck, sprang, bulging-eyed. He was away, veering and running; and riding like an Indian, Mr. Revere sat tight and let him go.

“Bueno, bueno!” cheered the Mexican, excited.

“He’ll fall off! He’ll be hurt!” cried Terry’s mother. “Why did he do it?”

“No, he won’t,” hopefully answered Terry; but he had some doubts, himself.

However, Harry had not fallen off, yet. Sitting bareback, with nothing, not even a bridle, to hold on by, except his legs, he clung fast, his hair streaming, his body yielding to every lunge of the colt. It was a great sight.

Out through the oat patch dashed the colt, through the corn, and almost to the creek. He turned, and sped back. His rider could be heard talking to him.

"Whoa, boy! Steady, now."

The rope hung lax, so that he ran free. Past the corral they flashed, on another circuit. Mr. Revere's face was flushed by the breeze, and he had time merely to wave his hand reassuringly. But how he could ride! Returning again, the colt was running less frenziedly; he showed a disposition to slacken, at the corral—and Harry, with a shake of the rope, urged him on.

"He's finding out who's master," called Harry. "I can guide him a little—" and actually did.

The colt shook his head, but coursed along.

Now a new voice chimed in.

"Bravo! There's a rider!"

It was the voice of Sol Judy, the Californian, who had arrived here in the midst of events and was sitting his horse, watching.

"What man's that?" asked Sol.

"He's Harry Revere, my partner," explained Terry, proudly. "He's breaking the colt."

"He is, is he? That his business? You've got another buster here. Hello, Manuel?" And Mr. Judy nodded to the Mexican.

"No, sir; he's a school teacher."

"School master!" And Mr. Judy laughed loudly. "Well, if he can educate boys like he can horses he must be a humdinger. He's a regular *vaquero*; eh, Manuel?"

"Bueno! Si, si," agreed the Mexican, watching fascinated.

The colt was coming back at a canter, as if willing to quit. His hide was wet with sweat. At a slight tug of the rope, stop he did, before the little group; and from his back Mr. Revere grinned cheerfully. The colt cautiously turned his head and sniffed at his rider's leg, as if wondering what kind of a thing this was, on his back. Mr. Revere reached forward to pat his nose.

"Whoa, boy. You're all right. Want to ride him, Terry?" he asked.

"I'd just as lief," asserted Terry.

"No, not yet, Terry," pleaded his mother.

"Wait. I'd show you how gentle this colt is, now he isn't frightened." Harry kicked off his shoes.

"Gwan, colt," he ordered, gaily, with slap of the rope.

"Look, look!" gasped Terry's mother; for as the colt rebelliously loped along, Harry had risen upright and was standing like a circus rider.

Yes, there he was, standing straight and balancing easily, in spite of his lame foot. Back he came—but at a sudden turn of the colt he had to sit down. No! Look!

"For mercy-sakes-alive!" ejaculated Terry's mother.

Harry was standing on his hands, his feet in the air. Just as the colt arrived, Harry flopped off and landed on the ground, where, holding the colt, he bowed and panted.

"Bueno, bueno!" cheered the Mexican. "You vaquero, hey?"

"Whoopee!" yelled Sol Judy, as if enthused. "Gimme room." He spurred his horse—at a mad, tearing gallop he, too, stood in the saddle. Plumping down again, he swerved his horse in figures of eight—sprang off—bounding beside, vaulted on again; dropped his handkerchief, and bending low as he re-passed at top speed, hung far and cleverly picked it up; fumbled at the saddle—uncinched it—let it slide from beneath him—removed the bridle, too—dropped his boots and (all at top speed) leaping to earth, holding his horse only by the lariat ran after like a deer and at a spring was on his back. He stood, turned about, and came riding with his face to the rear.

As he jumped off they all clapped and cheered.

"You didn't stand on your hands, though," reminded Terry.

"No," laughed Sol. "Never tried that. Can't stand on 'em on the ground. But where'd you learn to ride, stranger?" he queried of Mr. Revere.

"Oh, I was brought up with horses, down in Virginia," replied Harry.

"You're a humdinger," praised Sol.

"Oh, anybody who can ride that yellow mule of mine can ride an easy-gaited colt," laughed Harry. "But you're somewhat of a humdinger, yourself."

After being well petted, all around, and given a lick of sugar by Mrs. Richards, the colt was turned out to pasture with his anxious mother. Manuel the Mexican horse-breaker saddled up and rode off, in his gay shirt, on his chafing pony, for whom Terry felt sorry.

"I came past, ma'am," announced Sol, to Mrs. Richards, "to see how you're getting along, and to say that in my opinion your husband is alive and active, and has traveled on west for the mountains with a party of gold seekers."

"I met him!" exclaimed Terry.

Sol listened attentively to the story.

"That's the man, I reckon," he nodded. "By name of Jones. There was a man with a bad knock on the head picked up by some freighters and taken on east up the trail, over a month ago. 'Peared confused like; but he seemed to get well, and, far as I can make out, he joined in with the Green Russell party for the mountains. But they've got too big a start to be overhauled now."

"He'll come back," asserted Terry's mother, just as she always said.

"He will, ma'am," encouraged Sol. "Some day he'll wake up and know who he is. It's a wild-goose chase, anyhow. I look to see 'em all back before winter—or next spring, at the latest."

Sol Judy rode away. The work on the ranch continued. The corn and the garden were coming on finely, and soon the oat patch was green with the myriad spears. The chickens and Pete the tamed turkey thrived on the innumerable bugs and worms and seeds. Spot and Buck, the oxen, grew fat and rather lazy, for with the mare and the yellow mule to help with the work, they had an easy-going time.

As for the colt, he took readily to saddle and bridle, gently applied; and Terry made no bones of mount-

ing him—rode him down to George's, and everywhere.

These were busy days. There seemed to be no chance of starting a school among the valley settlers, while the crops were coming on, and Terry was glad of it. He needed his partner. But evenings, Mrs. Richards brought out the blue-backed Webster's spelling-book, or Harry brought out the arithmetic or geography that he had used at college, and they held a little school of their own. George came over, whenever he could, to join in. And on Sundays nobody worked, except to do the regular chores. Some chapters in the Bible were read aloud by Terry's mother or by Harry; the Stantons came over to the Richards' or the Richards went over to the Stantons'; and Terry and Harry usually walked down to the timber along the creek.

The timber and the creek made about the best place on the ranch, except, of course, the cabin. Harry estimated that the timber crop, for fuel and rails and lumber, was the most valuable crop that the ranch had. There were lots of fruit, too, growing wild: walnuts, hickory nuts (these would not ripen before fall, of course), plums, mulberries, may-apples (that grew on carrotty roots, in the shade), strawberries (in the open places), raspberries, and gooseberries which would be fine for jam.

Besides, there was the creek itself, where a fellow could take a swim after supper, summer evenings, to get cooled off and cleaned up; there were the turkeys, including several coveys of baby ones, and deer—or at

least plenty of tracks; maybe the he-panther, mate to the skin on the cabin wall; and the bee tree.

The bee tree was discovered in this wise—on a Sunday afternoon when George was over and he and Terry and Harry Revere were taking a walk down toward the timber. 'Twas odd, too, that this very morning the chapters from the Bible had included one about a land of "milk and honey."

"Wish we had some, don't you, ma?" had appealed Terry, smacking his lips.

"I wish we had the milk, anyway," had admitted his mother. "That's the hardest thing to do without—that and butter. But if we could get a cow, we'd have both."

A little milk could be obtained from the Stantons, and a little butter; but not nearly enough, and Terry fully agreed that to do without was a real trial.

Harry scratched his nose.

"I don't see any cow, just now," he confessed. "There's honey, though."

"Where?"

"All around."

"Aw, in the flowers!" scoffed Terry. "But we aren't bees; we can't suck it out."

"No," mused Harry. "I guess we'll have to do a little trading."

What he meant he did not say. However, on the afternoon walk he appeared unusually thoughtful. He paused on the edge of the cornfield, where the corn was tasseling. A myriad of bees were busy gathering pollen.

"Bees," he addressed, "where are you-all going with our pollen and our honey."

"The flowers were here first, before we were," corrected George.

"But the corn wasn't," argued Harry. "And on this ranch we all work together. What I want to know, is, where these bees are going."

The bees arrived with a rush; they clawed about, on the tassels, filling their leg pouches with the yellow pollen—then they let go and sometimes almost turning a somersault in their eagerness buzzed away like golden bullets on the back trail.

"They're all going yonder," declared Terry. "See? Off toward the timber."

"So are we, then," announced Harry. "Come on, and keep your eyes on the bees." He limped for the timber.

"What is it? A bee tree?" queried George, as with Terry and Shep, both mystified, he followed.

"Hope so. All that honey and pollen is being stored somewhere, isn't it?"

"But, shucks!" scoffed George. "There are about a thousand trees. We can't follow all these bees, can we? They'll mix us up. The way the bee-hunters do in Indiana is to catch a bee and feed him honey, and paint him and tie a white rag to his leg and then follow *him*; and when he gets away, catch another."

"All right," said Harry. "You catch a bee and tie your handkerchief to his leg—or tie a long thread to it and hold the other end."

"No, sir-ee!" objected George.

They met many bees, winging swiftly close over their heads, making for the corn; and as many passed them, in the opposite direction. Terry noted that the bees on the flowers, also, having finished loading with honey and pollen rose abruptly and launched for the timber.

But at the timber edge the bees were still going in and coming out. Harry paused, and surveyed the trees and scratched his nose.

"We'd better separate, I think. One of you on the right, and one on the left; and I'll stay in the middle. When any of us get to where the bees with the honey are coming toward us, we'll know we've passed the home. And when they're making off kitty-corner instead of straight away, we'll know their home is at one side. So we'll have to change direction, too. Understand?"

"Sure," assented George. "Just keep tracking 'em."

"And when you find the center, where all the bees come together, listen hard and look sharp, and yell to the rest of us."

George took the right, Terry took the left—and so, of course, did Shep. Pretty soon they lost sight of one another, in the brush and trees.

Terry proceeded cautiously. Very pleasant was it, here in the fragrant, warm timber flecked by sun and shade. The majority of the flowering trees had dropped their petals and were showing fruit; but sun and shade alike proffered a succession of flowers on the shrubs and plants, and the bees had abundant forage.

Terry kept his eyes on the bees, when they lighted and rose again.

He had proceeded only a short distance, when it seemed to him that the bees were changing direction—just as Harry had suggested that they might. He stopped. Yes, sir! Watch that patch of blue flowers, and you see most of the bees coming in sort of from the right, and lighting, and clawing, and darting off to the right. They disappeared mighty quick, in the trees, but that is where they went.

So Terry—followed by Shep, much puzzled but willing to help—turned to the right, himself.

The bees led him in a half circle, as he was tempted more and more to the right. They were tantalizing things. They never met him when they were loaded; they always were lighting, clawing, and flying away again. And suddenly he found himself staring hard at the same patch of blue flowers. The very same patch! He recognized it by that log with the big yellow fungus growing on the dead bark. Humph! He had made a whole circle. Shep gazed up at him inquiringly, as if to ask: "Well, what next? What you looking for now?"

But instantly Terry knew. The bees were still swerving, laden, to the right; always to the right—and their home was somewhere inside that circle!

He cut in, peering, listening, eyes and ears wide open, and Shep, imitating him, sneaked along behind, to back him up in this mysterious hunt. The bees began to be more and more difficult to mark. They landed like bullets dropping, and rose like rockets—straight up. Terry heard a vague humming, and craned his

neck. The bees were darting every which way—the leafy branches were full of them, high above his head. He circled around and around, stumbling on the brush; and Shep, evidently expectant of a squirrel, continued to imitate him.

“I see it!” exclaimed Terry. “Hurrah!”

It was fat burr-oak tree, the spreading branches alive with the bees arriving from all directions. Face up-turned, he trod around and around it, like a squirrel hunter indeed. He heard a confusing drone—and when he stumbled against the trunk, and his cheek brushed it, the drone was louder. He pressed his ear to the rough bark; the trunk fairly vibrated, from within. He kicked it, and thought it sounded hollow. There were bees inside, at any rate. And presently, as he circled and peered, he saw them passing in and out of a hole, at least twenty feet aloft. A regular stream of them! He had found a bee tree!

“Whoo-ee!” sang Terry, excited. “Whoo-ee!”

“Whoo-ee!” came the answer. “Where are you?”

“Right here. I found it!”

“You did!” George crashed through the brush, and appeared, hurrying. “Where is it?”

“This big oak. Hear ’em? See ’em?”

“I should say!” gasped George, hot and wet. “I’d have found it, too. I’ve been right on the trail, making this way. Now we’ll have to get axes and cut it down.”

“Won’t they sting us?”

“Not much, if we smoke ’em first. Build a fire of

rotten wood and chop a hole below 'em and send the smoke up through."

"Supposing we can't find a hole low enough."

"Chop the tree down anyway, I guess," hazarded George. "Then make a smudge, and fight with branches and things, till the bees quit."

The job did not look very inviting; already the bees were taking offense, as if understanding the danger to their store. Shep dropped his tail, in alarm.

"We can't do it to-day, anyhow," said Terry. "It's Sunday."

"Shucks!" uttered George, realizing. "That's so." And he added: "Listen! Harry's calling."

They answered. Harry answered. Shep pricked his ears.

"He isn't coming. Guess he wants us. Come on. We'll remember where the tree is." And Terry hustled away, with George regretfully following.

Harry was standing on the edge of a little bay or open clearing, of the timber edge, which faced the direction of the cabin.

"We found it," cried Terry.

"Terry found it, but I've seen it," corrected George. "It's a big oak."

"How high are they?"

"Way up."

"We'll have to cut it down, then, sometime. I'll look at it to-morrow. Now let's go back to the house. We've got company; see?"

They looked. Several horses were standing at the

cabin door; so were several men, and Mrs. Richards was talking with them.

"Injuns!" exclaimed George. "Bet they're Del-awares!"

"That's right," agreed Terry. "Hope General Jackson's with 'em."

"That means something to eat," declared Harry. "We'd better be on hand. The bee-tree will wait but maybe those callers won't."

He went leaping across the creek on a series of stepping-stones, in a short-cut, and they all hastened for the cabin.

CHAPTER XIII

HUNTING WITH THE DELAWARES

THE Delawares they were—three of them: General Jackson, and Black Beaver the hunter, and another. Their ponies were standing with hide ropes dragging, to catch them by should they wander, and the Indians themselves, draped in buffalo robes, had squatted in a half circle, at the cabin door, while Terry's mother, considerably flustered, was trying to talk with them. She acted much relieved, as if glad to have help, when Harry and George and Terry arrived.

General Jackson rose, and gravely extended his hand.

"How-do?" he greeted, to Terry. He shook hands all around, and so did the two others.

"Bring 'um," vouchsafed General Jackson, holding out to Terry the necklace—the necklace of the panther claws sewed into a strip of deer hide. "Wear 'um. Heap hunter."

"Is that yours?" exclaimed George. "Jiminy! Look at it! Panther claws."

"I guess so," answered Terry, now flustered, himself. "But I don't know. Is it?" he asked, doubtfully, of General Jackson. "Mine? How much?"

"Um," grunted General Jackson. "Keep. Kill 'um panther, wear 'um claws."

"Thanks; heap thanks," responded Terry. He slipped the necklace over his head (for the circle was fully large enough) and it hung low on his chest. The points of the sharp claws, in a row like a fringe, curving in against his shirt, threatened to scratch through, but not for the world would he have told anybody.

"That's certainly a fine piece of work," praised Harry. "Wonder how they stitched those claws in, just at the ends, that way."

"Squaw," grunted General Jackson. "Now go 'um hunt," he said, to Terry. "Want 'um go?"

A hunt! General Jackson was armed with a good rifle, so was Black Beaver, and the third Indian had a smooth-bore musket or yager. They looked as if they were ready to start.

"Where?" asked Terry, eagerly.

General Jackson swung his arm in gesture to the west.

"Kill 'um deers, kill 'um buffs, kill 'um heap meat. Me go, Black Beaver he go, John Bushman (and he indicated the third Delaware, who seemed to be only a little younger than Black Beaver), he go. You go? Odder boy, he go?"

"I'd like to," asserted George, his black eyes sparkling. His face fell. "But I don't believe I can. Got to take some butter to town. And take Virgie, too. I promised her."

"Can I go, ma? Mother, can I go?" appealed Terry. "I'll get us some meat: deer, buffalo, heap meat, General Jackson says!"

"Why—," faltered his mother. "There's so much

work, Terry. I don't see how we can spare you. I thought you and Harry were to build fences."

"We can spare him," put in Harry. "That is, I can if you can. The fences can wait till fall. I doubt if we could get at them before, anyway. I can manage the rest of the work. It's time he had a few days off, don't you think?"

Good for Harry!

"How long will you be gone?" asked Terry's mother, of General Jackson—and she still was a little dubious.

"Mebbe two day, mebbe three day. Kill 'um meat. Come back. No fear."

"We's 'speck 'um three day, mebbe," spoke John Bushman, in guttural tone. "Boy no hurt."

"But supposing you meet wild Indians!" gasped Terry's mother.

"Kill 'um. Take scalp," grunted John Bushman. "We no 'fraid. One Delaware he whip ten Cheyenne; Kiowa too. Bah!"

"Oh!" gasped Terry's mother.

"I'll bring meat and scalps both, ma," cheered Terry. "I'll take dad's gun and the colt."

"Fetch 'um dog," ordered General Jackson, pointing at Shep. "Delaware scalp 'um Cheyenne; dog bite 'um Kiowa. Huh!"

"But we'll need Shep to protect us here," retorted Terry's mother. "When do you start?"

Hurrah! She was yielding.

"Start 'um now."

"Not on Sunday," declared Terry's mother, firmly.

"White boys do not hunt on Sunday. They rest; no play, little work. Understand? He can go to-morrow, but not to-day."

"Humph!" grunted General Jackson. "Clistchun (by which he meant Christian, evidently). White man make medicine one day, 'um last he six day. Injun make medicine every day."

He and the two other Delawares talked together briefly, in their own tongue.

"All right," said General Jackson. "Mebbe stay. Black Beaver, he say mebbe stay, mebbe big eat 'um, hunt to-morrow. White boy make medicine to-day for hunt; to-morrow go, kill 'um heap deers, heap buffs. Huh!"

"Big eats, remember, Mother Richards," laughed Harry. "That means sugared coffee for supper."

"I'll do the best I can," she promised. "But you boys can't have any. Once in a while for us is all we can afford."

"I'd rather have milk, anyway; wouldn't you?" asserted George, to Terry.

"Soon as we get a cow."

"You can bring a buffalo home, and milk it! Wish I was going."

"I'll tell you all about it," engaged Terry, excited. "Next time we'll both go. We can go off by ourselves, when I've learned how. We found a bee tree, mother! Down in the timber. A great big tree, chock full of honey. Don't you cut it down till I come back, Harry; will you?"

"Not a twig. The longer we wait the more honey

there'll be. The bees will keep piling it in, all summer; see?"

"Wonder if I've got enough powder and shot," planned Terry, busily. "I can ride the colt, can't I. Heap colt," he informed, to General Jackson. "Run fast, catch 'um buffalo; bang!"

"Good," grunted General Jackson, gravely.

"Don't be in a hurry, now, Terry," cautioned his mother. "It's still Sunday, you know."

"After the sun sets I can look at the gun, can't I?" pleaded Terry.

"Perhaps," she smiled.

Presently George was obliged to leave, to do his chores at home. He went regretfully, but he was certain that he'd have to take the butter down to Manhattan, instead of going hunting.

The three Delawares had again squatted solemnly in a row against the side of the cabin, their robes pulled up around their necks, and apparently were expecting the "big eat 'um."

After supping heartily on biscuits and coffee with plenty of sugar in it, the Delawares slept outside, rolled in their buffalo robes. Terry turned in early, himself, to be ready for an early start in the morning. He was on his colt, at sun-up, equipped with a blanket, and shot-gun and powder-flask and a pouch of buck-shot, prepared to ride, when General Jackson grunted:

"Huh! Take 'um dog."

"He's to stay here," answered Terry. "They'll need him. Big watch 'um; see?"

"Take 'um dog," insisted General Jackson. "Ketch 'um buff, bite 'um Injun. Heap dog. Humph!"

"Shall I?" queried Terry, of his mother and Harry, who were standing by to wish good luck.

"It looks as though you'd have to, dear," and she laughed a little ruefully. "Anyway, I'll feel safer about you if Shep's along. And he wants to go."

"Come on, Shep, old boy," invited Terry; and at the summons Shep, who had been gazing with ears pricked, sprang forward, barking and capering. He'd enjoy a hunt as much as the rest. In fact, he didn't care where he was going, if only he went.

Black Beaver led off. General Jackson followed, Terry rode next, and John Bushman brought up the rear. Shep raced from side to side, routing out the jack-rabbits and charging the prairie dogs. His hunting began at once.

The Delawares kept their buffalo robes high around their necks, and the single file proceeded at a smart trot, with never a word spoken. Almost straight west proceeded Black Beaver, for the ridge of hills dividing the Valley of the Blue from the Valley of the Republican. They crossed the rolling prairie, fresh and dewy, covered with tall grasses and flowering shrubs and plants; startled several bands of antelope into swift, graceful flight after a moment of staring with banded heads uplifted; and threading shallow draws and climbing in and out of gullies climbed the hither slope of the hills.

Black Beaver seemed to know just where he was going, and he also seemed in a hurry to get there. He did not halt once, not even to kill an antelope. The Indian ponies pressed forward at trot and occasionally

at fast walk. Shep's tongue soon was hanging out, as he loped beside Terry, but the colt proved to be as good as the ponies, and Terry, with his panther claw necklace bobbing on his chest, was determined to show that he could ride as far as anybody. But the shotgun, across his lap, was getting heavy.

They topped the divide; the Valley of the Blue lay behind and below. Terry thought he could see the Stantons' place, but his own home was out of sight, around a timbered shoulder of the hills. Next, the Valley of the Republican unfolded, before and below, with never a sign of a settlement in it. They had struck it far above the settlements. At the lower end were Fort Riley and ranches, but here there was nothing except the open country, where buffalo roamed and where the wild Indians like the Cheyennes and the Sioux and the tame Indians like the Delawares and Shawnees hunted.

Black Beaver halted for a survey. All halted, while the horses puffed and nibbled at the herbage. Gut-tural comments were exchanged. The Delawares had dropped their robes around their waists, and were riding in their calico shirts.

General Jackson pointed.

"Buffs," he said. "Heap buffs."

Down in the valley, fringed through the middle by the timber of the Republican River, and dotted with other timber, was a black mass, on the right. It looked like goose-berry bushes, or other bushes. Didn't move, did it? And those were buffalo, had said General Jackson! What a lot of them, then—covering several acres! Thousands of buffalo, feeding!

"Heap buffs," agreed Terry, breathing hard. Now what—charge them?

"Ant'lopes," grunted General Jackson, with another gesture, toward a smaller blotch, of dark flecked with white, like a carpet. Even as they gazed, the carpet billowed and moved. The antelope were in flight. They were uneasy creatures, very panicky, and at lightning speed they swept along, until they stopped and grazed again.

"Heap antelopes," agreed Terry.

"Deers; mebbe elks," grunted General Jackson, indicating the valley. "No hunt now. Eat."

Black Beaver led off again, and they descended, in single file, winding down through timber and parks, while the sun sank lower in their faces; and suddenly, at the foot of the slope, they rode right into a camp. It was a camp of more Delawares, located beside a stream, in a little basin or park amidst the trees. There were a number of brush lean-tos, ponies grazing, two fires smouldering, with pots hanging above them, three squaws, in calico wrappers, two men, several children, and half a dozen dogs who made a rush, barking, at Shep. Shep bristled and stood his ground (he had met Indian dogs before, and they were big bluffers); and the dogs decided to wait. The Indian women threw sticks at them, until they slunk off, still growling.

Amidst short choky greetings Terry's Delawares slipped from their ponies, so Terry dismounted also—and glad enough was he to do it. The saddle had grown very hot, and hard. The women came and led the horses away, to turn them out to water and

grass. Black Beaver and John Bushman squatted beside one of the pots, General Jackson beckoned Terry to the other. The pots were bubbling and smelled delicious. The women came back, and with gourd spoons ladled from the pots, to bark platters, and handed the platters around. General Jackson began to eat with his hunting-knife and his fingers, and Terry saw nothing now to do but to do likewise. That was the Indian way. So he speared and scraped with his knife, and sucked his fingers. Wah! Heap good!

One of the women was Black Beaver's wife; another was John Bushman's wife; the other was the wife of Jim Ned—the man who sat with a blanket over his head because, as Terry found out afterward, he was part Negro and had short woolly hair which he tried to hide. The other man was a Shawnee. He had short straight black hair and a round dark face. The Delawares and the Shawnees lived together as brothers. Fall Leaf wasn't here.

Judging by the pots, and by the bones, and by the deer hides pegged out to dry, the camp already had been hunting. But after the meal General Jackson gave no indication of starting out; neither did anybody else. They just lay around and "lazed." Terry determined to ask no questions. With his panther necklace, which entitled him to be ranked as a mighty hunter himself, he felt that he could be as much Indian as anybody.

The men stretched out and dozed; the dogs quit growling and bristling, and slept; the children played quiet games, except two babies who, wrapped up and

strapped to boards, were set against a couple of trees, whence they stared with beady black eyes—principally at Terry, and Shep. And the women worked.

How they did work! Mrs. John Bushman and Mrs. Jim Ned, on their hands and knees, scraped and scraped at a deer hide each, using bone scrapers with which to remove the flesh. Occasionally one or the other grunted a sentence, but they did not talk often; they were too busy. Mrs. Black Beaver hustled to the creek, toiled back with a kettle of water, put it on the fire, and seizing a hatchet actually began to chop wood. Terry debated whether he ought not to help; but none of the men took any notice, so he did not dare.

Next Mrs. Black Beaver began to cut meat into pieces—and when a baby cried she gave it a strip of gristle to suck. The pieces of meat were tossed into the kettle. The dogs got the scraps—Shep the most.

In a couple of hours Black Beaver rose, looked at the low sun, and said something. General Jackson stood up. The other men roused.

“Now little hunt,” informed General Jackson, to Terry. “Kill ’um deers. Deers sleep, Injuns sleep. Pret’ soon deers get up, eat, drink; Injuns get up, kill ’um.”

“Buffalo, too?” asked Terry, expectant.

“Buffs to-morrow. Ketch ’um deers. Get hoss. Come.” And as he turned away he added: “Tie up dog. No good for deers.”

The Delaware men (including the Shawnee) were saddling their horses, and Terry hurried to the colt. He saddled in a jiffy, and tied Shep to a tree, and was

ready. General Jackson beckoned to him, so they rode off together. Shep, much disappointed, whined after. The squaws kept right on working. Hunting was no pleasure for *them*.

General Jackson led at an amble through some timber, and struck down a grassy draw. Terry, close following, alertly peered and listened, prepared to see a deer at any moment. It looked like a good deer place. He did hear one—or at least some noise that sounded like one; but General Jackson never paused. They rode for half an hour, ever getting farther from camp, and Terry was lost completely, when General Jackson reined in his pony and swept a keen glance around.

“Deers here,” he said. “Mebbe ketch ’um. Get off, tie pony.”

Before extended a meadow, rich with grass and flowers, and held in the bend of a creek. The timber skirted it on all sides. General Jackson moved his pony back deeper among the trees and tied him; Ernest did the same with the colt.

“Now we go t’odder side,” explained General Jackson. “Wind bad, dis side. Mudder deer, he hide fawn in brush, mebbe so sleep, mebbe so eat, mebbe so drink. Delaware make noise like fawn, mudder he run out, Delaware shoot ’um. Huh!”

With General Jackson treading noiselessly on moccasined soles, and Terry trudging breathlessly on tip-toe, they made half circuit of the meadow, until the General reached what evidently he judged was a good spot. He composedly sank down behind a clump of brush, motioned to Terry to sit beside him; and rest-

ing his rifle across his knees extracted from the bosom of his shirt what appeared to be a short joint of cane.

"Make 'um fawn noise, ketch 'um doe," he remarked, to Terry.

He put the piece of cane to his lips, and blew through it—and it must have had a reed tongue in it, like the reed of a horn, for it gave out a funny squawk. Sounded like a lamb bleat, only it was thinnner and squeakier.

"Watch for mudder, come out, think he hear fawn calling," explained General Jackson, pausing. "When come close, shoot 'um."

He continued to bleat. The meadow, before, was quiet and sunny; the stream rippled, and the sun cast long shadows. The bleat of the reeded cane shrilled insistent. Terry watched right and left.

With movement almost imperceptible General Jackson's elbow nudged Terry's. A deer? Terry's eyes roved hither, thither—and he saw it, on the edge of the timber, to the left: a deer, standing there, head up, facing them.

General Jackson's bleating changed its notes—grew shriller, kind of imploring; and while he played away, out came the deer. It was a doe—a mother doe. Ears pricked, nostrils wide, stepping high and alarmed, straight she trotted into the meadow and made right for them. She halted, she advanced again, seeking her baby. What a beautiful thing she was! She had arrived so near that Terry could see her nostrils twitch, as she sniffed, and the liquid brown of her large soft eyes.

General Jackson's elbow nudged him again, as command to shoot. But how could anybody shoot a mother deer, this way, when she was coming to protect her baby? Evidently she didn't want to come; only, she had to—and she suspected a trap. Terry, all a-tremble, didn't raise his gun. It was a dead shot; why, he could have blown her head off the way he blew off the head of the panther—but somehow, he simply could not shoot her, as she stood there, listening, sniffing, staring right at them, fearing for herself but fearing more for her baby.

In his impatience General Jackson must have uttered a false note, or else the breeze shifted; for on a sudden, with a snort the mother whirled and at a bound was away, into the timber. Quick though she was, General Jackson was almost as quick; his rifle leaped to his shoulder—"Bang!"

Up he sprang, and forward he ran, Terry bolting excitedly after.

"Did you hit her? Did you hit her?"

General Jackson was searching on the leaves and grasses, at the spot where the mother had vanished. He was not in good humor.

"Why you no shoot 'um?" he demanded, angrily. "Me call 'um, you shoot 'um. Why no?"

"I couldn't—it didn't seem fair," explained Terry.

"Humph!" grunted General Jackson. "Heap fool. Deer gone now." And he strode for the horses.

So he hadn't hit her, and Terry was glad. For supposing they had killed her, even on the run; then what would have became of the little fawn?

The General grumpily mounted his pony, Terry, feeling that he was in disfavor, mounted the colt, and they rode in a new direction. The Delaware acted as if on business bent; his hunting instincts were now all aroused, and he was bound to have a deer. A gun-shot echoed faintly through the timber, and he grunted again.

"Black Beaver," he said. "Huh! Get 'um deer."

From each little rise he cautiously searched before, ere continuing; and when he struck a gully he rode along the edge, and scanned the bottom and the opposite side.

They were in the Valley of the Republican, and were circuiting the borders of a timber island—a patch broken away from the hills, as though it had slipped—when he stopped again, with hand raised to warn Terry.

"Deers," he said. "Plenty deers. Sleep 'um day, feed 'um now."

Terry peered around the General. Before, beyond the trees, or where the trees thinned to scattered oaks and elms and hickories ere ceasing entirely, were at least twenty deer, cropping the grass and switching their short tails—occasionally lifting their heads and surveying for danger. They were four or five hundred yards distant, but very plain in the last rays of the setting sun. Several fawns were gamboling like lambs. It was a pretty sight—and General Jackson's nostrils widened eagerly. He turned his cheek, seeking the breeze; it wafted quartering. He slipped from his horse.

"Wait 'um," he bade, to Terry. "Me shoot 'um."

No fool dis time. Mebbe run, you shoot 'um." And he was gone, on silent foot, passing like a shadow through the timber, to make a circuit.

Terry sat, scarcely daring to move. The deer fed, all unconscious that somebody was stalking them. There was one big deer, among a bunch grazing by themselves. These were the bucks, probably; for most of the fawns were not yet weaned, and they and their mothers stayed together. Besides, as everybody knew, the bucks were growing new horns and were apt to be rather cross, until the horns hardened.

Look! There was General Jackson, off yonder, just emerging to the edge of the timber. He was bending low, and fairly slinking, from trunk to trunk, and shrub to shrub; but he moved swiftly and surely. He was almost close enough—wasn't he? Watch! He was on his knees, crouching, stationary, and leveling his rifle.

Terry dismounted in a jiffy. The deer were liable to come this way, up the draw, running with the breeze. Now every deer had raised its head, alarmed—and General Jackson's rifle rang smartly. Instantly the whole herd were in full flight, scouring up the draw. Terry sprang forward, to the farthest tree that he could reach—he barely had time, for they were coming, the big fellow leading, the little fawns gallantly forging in the rear.

They suddenly swerved in, as if panic stricken by another enemy—and as they careered past, Terry's gun leaped of itself to his shoulder, he took quick aim just ahead of the leader, and pulled both triggers. As he went sprawling, backward, he saw the big fellow plunge

on his nose, roll over and over; and when Terry hastily rose, the herd had streamed on with flash of white tails, but the big fellow was lying in a mass of brown and red.

Out ran Terry, wildly jubilant—and from opposite rode down a horseman.

The deer was stone dead, riddled by the buckshot. He was a buck, his horns still in the velvet—and he was a big one.

“Humph! Good! Heap good,” praised the horseman, to Terry. “Shoot ’um on run.”

He was Black Beaver, and it was he who had made the herd swerve. He bore behind his saddle another carcass. Terry straightened up proudly. Black Beaver dismounted, and with his hunting knife opened the dead deer’s throat, to let out the blood. Terry knew this ought to be done, but he hated to do it himself.

“General Jackson get ’um ’nodder,” said Black Beaver. “Now bring out hoss, put ’um on. Then go get odder.”

Yes, in the open, where the deer had been feeding, General Jackson was busy. Terry led out his colt, and held him while Black Beaver lifted the limp body across the haunches, and with the hide rope tied the legs together, underneath; drawing them forward with a half hitch or two, throwing a couple of wrappings around the body also.

The colt did not fancy this, but stood fast. Then they rode with General Jackson’s pony down to his owner, and tied that deer on, also.

“Huh! White boy shoot ’um two time, one deer,”

criticized General Jackson, as he climbed into his saddle; but he did not speak unkindly, this time, and Terry felt pretty well satisfied with himself.

So, bearing a deer apiece, they rode back, in the twilight, to camp, and arrived at dusk.

CHAPTER XIV

MORE LIVESTOCK FOR THE RANCH

"Now sleep. Buffs to-morrow," were the last words, to-night, of General Jackson, indicating that it was time to turn in.

The deer hunt had been a great success, evidently. Jim Ned, John Bushman, the Shawnee—everybody had returned with pony laden. John Bushman had brought in two deer, and the Shawnee an elk. All the carcasses were dumped down, for the women, and the women had immediately set to work with their knives. They worked by ruddy firelight, after darkness fell; deftly removed the hides and heads, and proceeded to cut the bones and meat apart as if they were determined not to waste a morsel. They now and then tucked a piece of the raw meat into their mouths, or passed a choice bit to the children: yes, chewed the liver, uncooked—and Mrs. John Bushman, with a grin, offered a slice of the liver, dipped in the gall, to Terry! When he didn't take it, she ate it, herself.

But for those who wanted their meat cooked, the pots were bubbling, and Terry filled himself so full that he, like the men, could only lie back, comfortably, and watch the squaws hack and haul at the deer. Shep, who had been roundly glad to see his master again, nodded over a bone between his paws, and presently,

with a contented sigh, curled himself in a ball, for the night. At General Jackson's suggestion, Terry was willing to do the same, for his eyes had sticks in them, and the flickering firelight, and the dark trees, and the bending figures of the squaws, and even the stars above, all blended together.

So he rolled himself up in his blanket on a buffalo robe to which the General pointed, with his feet to the fire and his head on his folded coat; and when the rest of the camp went to bed he did not know, but probably it was very soon.

"Buffs to-morrow," had said General Jackson. That meant a buffalo hunt.

The buffalo robe was soft and warm, the fire felt good through the blanket, and as seemed to Terry he hardly had snuggled, and closed his eyes so as to picture out the mother deer, and the running deer, and the way the big buck jumped and fell, and was saving the buffalo hunt till the last, when, before he had got to the coming buffalo hunt, he was aroused by the soft shuffle of the squaws' feet, and the crackle of the fires.

It was morning, already. The sky above was pink with sunrise, the trees were plainly outlined, and the squaws were preparing breakfast. Shep still slumbered, but the colt and the other horses grazed, the children were running about. Black Beaver emerged, yawning, from one of the brush lean-tos, and stalked down to the creek, where scarcely out of sight he took a bath; and as the camp was astir, Terry piled out, to do as the other Indian men did, and take a bath also.

He untied Shep, and they went together—Shep

heartily glad to stretch his legs, but limiting his own bath to a drink. After that he nosed about, had a little fight, over a bone; seized the bone and carried it to his tree and gnawed it. A dog who had tackled a panther was equal to getting a bone for himself.

The deer meat was being strung in strips, on long cords, from tree to tree, to dry in the open air; but by the way that chunks were popped into those pots and fished out again, to disappear, a hunt would be required every day! Such an appetite as Terry himself had, after his cold bath; and all the men ate as if they did not expect to eat again for a long time.

Immediately after breakfast Black Beaver rose, mounted his pony, and rode away.

"Finds buffs," informed General Jackson, to Terry; and the squaws, having finished their household tasks, as if in much anticipation began to grind the edges of their butcher knives, with flat stones.

In about an hour and a half Black Beaver returned. He spoke only a few sentences, motioning westward with his arm, but they were enough. Up sprang the Delaware men. The women, who had listened attentively, hustled to collect various belongings. It looked as though the whole camp was to be moved. However, Black Beaver must have brought good news, for every face was aglow.

"Heap buffs. Now ketch 'um," announced General Jackson. "Get pony. Come."

Hunting buffalo was a different matter from hunting deer. Terry was about to saddle the colt, when General Jackson interrupted.

"No good. No take 'um saddle. Ride pony, Injun way. Then fall off, no hurt."

So? Terry rather doubtfully eyed the contraption assigned to him. It was only a buffalo hide pad, to be strapped upon the colt's back. Of course, he *had* ridden bareback, many a time. This was but little better. However, all the ponies were similarly equipped, and the Delawares had even discarded the bridles, substituting therefor single hide thongs looped at one end around the ponies' lower jaws. The pad was deemed safer probably because it had no stirrups, to catch one's foot if one fell off; but Terry decided that the colt might not stand for the thong. Accordingly he retained his bridle, to which there were no objections.

Black Beaver and General Jackson and the other Delawares (including the Shawnee) had stripped themselves, also, quite to the skin. They were naked save for a cloth wrapping about their thighs, and a band of red flannel or of calico about their forehead—and all were armed with bows and quivers, except John Bushman, who had his smooth-bore musket, and the Shawnee, who carried a long lance.

"No got 'um bow?" queried the General. "Shoot 'um arrow fast, kill 'um heap more buffs."

"Aw, I can't shoot with bow and arrow—not to hit anything," confessed Terry. "I'll have to take my gun. Heap gun."

"Humph!" grunted General Jackson. "Kill 'um deer; mebbe kill 'um buff. No can tell. Try. Take 'um dog, ketch 'um calf." And he vaulted easily aboard his pony. Black Beaver led out. The squaws surely were breaking camp.

Terry hastily scrambled, gun in hand, upon his saddle pad, and with word to the joyous Shep joined the hunt. At a canter the little cavalcade, in single file, wound through the swales skirting the base of the hills and the edge of the broad valley. The Delawares, their sinewy bare legs pressed tight against their ponies' sides, bows in hand and bristling quivers slung high upon their backs, the Shawnee's lance extending aloft and John Bushman's yager across his knees, every man sitting like a bronze centaur, made a gallant sight. Terry's colt had a springy amble; and pressing his legs tight he soon found that he did not much miss the stirrups. This was great fun, riding like the Indians rode.

From the base of the hills they obliques westward into the valley by way of a shallow draw which hid them from the prairie on either side. Several bunches of antelope burst into flight, and tore away on either hand, but nobody paid any attention to them, except that General Jackson, immediately before Terry, grunted disapproval. Maybe he was afraid that they would scare the buffalo.

Where were the buffalo? Black Beaver had occasionally wet his finger and held it up, testing the breeze. Presently he lifted his hand, as signal to halt. He dismounted. Everybody dismounted. They followed Black Beaver up the slope of the draw, on the left; as they climbed, they crouched; Terry, breathless with excitement, crouched likewise—and Shep, at his heels, panting, crouched also.

The breeze wafted almost in their faces. Black Beaver paused, and tossed into the air a fragment of

dried grass. It fell to rearward. Yes, the breeze was all right. Now, as they neared the low crest of the rolling ground, Terry became conscious of a dull, confused rumble, similar to distant thunder. On hands and knees they crept to the top, and peered over. Borne on the breeze, the murmur suddenly swelled louder, deep and thunderous; and see, there were the buffalo, apparently thousands of them, turning the prairie black not a quarter of a mile before. Bulls roared, cows blared, calves were bounding here and there, as the great herd slowly moved, grazing as they went.

After the survey, heads were cautiously withdrawn; and the Delawares held a short confab. Black Beaver spoke, and gestured. Then they all retired down the slope, to the ponies. They mounted. Black Beaver and Jim Ned and the Shawnee promptly rode on; General Jackson and John Bushman turned back, and Terry of course stuck close behind them—Shep docily in his wake, as if aware that he must be careful.

At a trot they branched off into another low place, and pursued it until it opened into the prairie—and now, before on their right, and closer, was exposed a portion of the herd. Here the General and Terry sat motionless, while John Bushman rode aside, a little higher, to see more.

The nostrils of General Jackson expanded, his face was firmly set, once he twitched at the feathered ends of his arrows in the quiver, as though to feel that the arrows were loose—and he examined his bow. His pony, and the other horses, pricked forward their ears. They, too, knew. Evidently something was about to

happen with a rush. Under him, Terry felt his pony trembling. So they waited, while the buffalo rumbled, and the edge of the herd in sight grazed and fought and pawed and rolled.

John Bushman lifted his hand. Instantly General Jackson clapped heels against his pony, and with a single guttural "Come!" launched into full speed. At full speed John Bushman was charging, in dead run. Terry's colt needed no word, for he, also, had started with such a jump that his rider narrowly escaped falling off backward.

Terry clung hard. In a twinkling they were out of their ambush, and the whole vast herd lay spread before them. Across, almost opposite, straight at the fore flank of the herd three specks were scouring over the short grass. They were Black Beaver and Jim Ned and the Shawnee, who had made a half circuit.

For a moment or two the buffalo appeared not to sense that they were being attacked. They seemed not to see! What stupid animals—far less keen than deer and antelope. Faster dashed onward General Jackson and John Bushman, lashing their ponies with the quirts or braided hide whips hanging from their wrists, and faster spurred Terry, trying to overtake.

Suddenly up rose the head of a big bull, who on the edge of the herd was grazing, facing this way. For a brief instant he roundly stared, as if scarce believing his eyes. He whirled on the pivot of his four hoofs—up rose other heads, along the edge—and with simultaneous movement like the breaking loose of an

avalanche on a mountain-side the herd, whether seeing or not seeing, had stampeded into headlong flight.

The ground fairly shook to the pounding of those hoofs under the billowy flow of the myriad brown backs rolling densely. Obliquely athwart the valley they poured, running up wind, as buffalo usually did, so as to smell for danger before.

But their flight was too late. Clinging with both legs and one hand, and at the dead run bounced hardly at all on his saddle pad, Terry saw John Bushman reach the herd first—John's pony swerved in, close on the left of a lumbering monster—tore on, almost within arm's length—John dropped the barrel of his gun across his knees—didn't put the butt to his shoulder, but pulled trigger; and to the puff of smoke the buffalo jumped painfully, staggered, slackened, and fell behind while John Bushman, from his powder horn emptying a dash of powder into the muzzle and spitting a bullet from his mouth in after, passed on to the next nearest buffalo.

With the corner of his eyes Ernest noted the wounded buffalo drop to his knees, and sway. But now, with rapid motion, General Jackson had plucked from the quiver atop his left shoulder an arrow—had fitted it like lightning to his bow—and fairly brushing past a laboring cow drew bow—loosed it—whang! (Ernest heard the string hum)—and the cow also drifted aside. Under her fore leg just the end feathers of the arrow showed.

General Jackson plucked another arrow—he scarcely slackened, but drew bow again—whang! And “Boom!” spoke John Bushman's musket. Far yonder,

Black Beaver and Jim Ned were plying their bows, while the Shawnee evidently was thrusting with his lance.

So fiercely rode the General and John Bushman that strive as Terry might, hammering his colt with his heels and shouting "G'lang! G'lang with you!" he could not overtake them. As for Shep, he was toiling well to rearward; the pace had been too much for him. But how those Indians did ride! Just sat, near naked, on their near naked ponies, let the bridle thongs sway loose, and shot and shot—General Jackson apparently loosing three arrows to one load by John Bushman. And how those huge buffalo could run! They didn't look as though they were running fast; they simply ploughed along, with a curious plunging up and down movement, tails high and heads low; but they covered the ground at an amazing speed.

Amidst the rumble, and the reek of dust and hot breaths, in the wake of the herd's rear flank pressed Terry. The herd had begun to straggle. The old bulls and cows and the cows with calves were falling behind; and every now and then there was the wounded, and the dying.

Terry had not been enabled to fire a shot. The colt was less anxious than he to get into close quarters. But judging by the methods of John Bushman, to shoot a buffalo one must go right beside him. Before, on Terry's left, lumbered an enormous bull, the largest buffalo anywhere near. He occupied a place by himself, among the yellow little calves and the straining mothers. Terry hauled on the colt's bit, and with re-

peated hammerings and "G'lang's!" edged in for him.

The colt tossed his head and snorted rebelliously, but he obeyed, entering into the spirit of the chase. On lumbered the bull, nearer pressed Terry, inch by inch. He could hear the bull's panting wheeze as the breath whistled through his nostrils—could see his red tongue hanging out—his eyes bulging through his tangled forelock—the dust on his ridiculously scant rump and the matted brown hair dangling from his burly shoulders, for this was still shedding time with buffalo.

The colt was almost abreast of him, and Terry shifted his gun, to try to level it the way John Bushman had leveled the musket, when like a flash the bull whirled, head down, and bolted for the colt. With a prodigious leap, around whirled the colt also—and small wonder, for that bull looked like a gigantic lion. Who would have guessed that so large an animal could be so quick on his feet?

Terry almost lost his gun; and worse, he almost lost his seat. But he stuck, with one leg and one arm, while away raced the colt, in a panic, until Terry managed to haul him in. The bull had not chased; he had merely whirled, as a threat, and then had lumbered on again.

After him pelted Terry, bound to have him or at least to teach him a lesson upon respect for a boy wearing a panther claw necklace; drew up beside him, inch by inch, and was just about to swing the gun at him and blaze away, regardless, when again, as quick as a cat, around whirled the big bull, and charged. His horn actually grazed the colt's flank—"Bang!" exploded

the gun and well-nigh flew out of Terry's astonished hands—and away bolted the frightened colt.

This time the bull pursued for a short distance, until he stopped, pawed and rumbled, a moment, in indignant fashion, throwing the sod high and dripping froth down his beard and lolling red tongue; and then made after the herd.

He looked so large and sort of helpless, and so tired, that Terry laughed.

"Go on," he called. "I don't want you."

And neither did the colt.

Terry sat, calming the winded colt and taking breath himself. Before, the Delawares were still darting in and out, in their attacks. Fragments had been broken off from the main herd. Away at the front Black Beaver was chasing a single buffalo across the prairie; and yonder was General Jackson having a set-to with another big bull. The bull charged, General Jackson fled, his head over his shoulder—the bull turned back, and General Jackson charged. Presently down sank the bull; and Black Beaver had despatched his animal, also. Every Indian was busy.

Here the tail of the herd had dwindled out to the smallest yellow calves, and the weakest mothers, and several stiffest old bulls, and two or three cripples—all toiling hard for safety. Terry really had not the heart to try to kill any of these. In fact, it looked to him as though enough buffalo had been killed; the wake of the herd was dotted with the great bodies, prone on their sides or stomachs, where their legs had failed and had dropped them.

He bethought himself of Shep. Ah, there he came,

still behind, putting best foot forward as he bounded like a shaggy ball. Good old Shep. 'Twas a shame to leave him alone. Then, while waiting for him, Terry saw something else as his eyes roved, watching out for sights. Across the rear of the herd—the very rear, which had passed, he saw a cow! Not a buffalo, but a *cow*, a real cow! She was trying to keep up with the herd, and a little calf was trying to keep up with her, and they both were gradually being left.

She was a brindled cow, but the calf was a regular buffalo calf, yellow and humpy like the others.

“Hoo-ray!” gasped Terry, scarce believing his eyes. This was a prize, indeed—better than a dozen buffalo. With his exclamation he turned his colt's head, dug in his heels, and galloped to cut the cow off. If he could only catch *her*, and take *her* home, wouldn't his mother and Harry cheer!

It was a short race. The buffalo mothers had surged along paying no attention to the calves, even to the littlest ones; but this real cow mother acted as if very anxious that her calf should keep up. The colt, who did not like the buffalo, was not at all afraid of a brindled cow; and shouting and urging, Terry sped in ahead of her.

“Get out of here!” he yelled, waving his arm.

She swerved, then down went her head (she had only one horn) and she charged him as quickly as ever the big bull had charged, but much more wickedly

The colt dodged; she stood her ground, heaving and rumbling, and the calf ran almost under her. Terry rode in a circle, waving and shouting and trying to

drive her back. But she would not budge. She only faced him, ready to charge again.

Yes, plain brindled cow she was—rather gaunt, yet, but with full bag and sturdy frame. She had a broken horn and an ear square-cropped (that is, cut square off at the end) but she seemed to have no brand on her weather-beaten hide. As for the calf, he looked to be regular buffalo; a woolly little chap, higher at the shoulders than at the hips.

Now up came Shep, at last, his tongue flopping. Terry welcomed him, for Shep knew all about cows.

“Sick, Shep! Take care of her! Sick, boy!” ordered Terry, gladly.

At the cow’s heels darted Shep, barking—she whirled on him—charged a few steps, Shep sprang aside, was at her heels again, nipping, and he kept her so busy that she had no time to attend to either Terry or her calf.

The calf was left by himself. He blatted bewildered and frightened, for an instant; and on a sudden, running a few steps, he dropped to his knees, thrust his nose into a bunch of grass not more than six inches high, closed his eyes tight, and there he stood, thinking that he was hiding!

It was such a funny thing to do that Terry had to laugh. However, Shep was still engaged with the cow; and taking down his hide picket rope from where it dangled, looped about his colt’s neck, dismounting and leading the colt by the bridle lines he stole forward.

The calf thrust his nose in further and closed his eyes tighter, and never bulged. Terry cautiously passed the

end of the rope around the firm, warm fuzzy neck, hastily knotted it, and started to back to the colt—when up straightened the calf, stared for an instant, and before Terry could dodge had butted him sprawling. The colt jerked the lines from Terry's hands, the gun flew wide, and when Terry hastily scrambled on all fours until he had gained his feet he found himself alone at one end of the rope and the calf, bawling and tugging, at the other.

The mother heard; she started, but Shep nipped her and she changed ends again. The rascal of a woolly calf bounded for Terry, with another sudden butt, and Terry side-stepped none too soon. Shucks! Watchful of the calf, in vain he tried to grab the colt's bridle.

"Hold her, Shep!" he encouraged. But he was not very confident as to how things were going to turn out, until a shrill whoop reached his ears, and he saw General Jackson galloping for him, across the rolling prairie dotted with buffalo bodies.

CHAPTER XV

ON THE WAR TRAIL

THE attack on the buffalo herd had ended; the black mass of the frightened animals was streaming on in the distance, several smaller detachments were fleeing to right and left, and the Indians were riding back, over the field, occasionally pausing beside a carcass.

General Jackson's quiver was empty of all except two or three arrows; his tired pony fairly dripped with sweat. He halted, near, to survey Terry and the calf, and Shep and the cow. His lips parted with a grin.

"How ketch 'um?" he called. "Calf ketch 'um boy, dog ketch 'um cow; huh?"

"Looks that way," admitted Terry, wary of the fractious calf who stood straddly-legged but alert. "You hold this calf till I ketch 'um horse; will you?"

"Tie 'um calf, kill 'um cow," proposed General Jackson, reaching for an arrow.

"No!" cried Terry. "Keep 'um cow, keep 'um calf; take 'um home."

"Humph!" grunted General Jackson, relenting. "Take whoa-haw to farm; mudder she milk he." And with sudden energy he charged the cow, flourishing his bow.

That was too much for the cow. Evidently she was afraid of an Indian. Away she scampered, Shep at her heels. Shep quit and lay down, to keep his eyes upon her lest she try to return, and the General came back to Terry.

Terry had been seeking something to which to tie the calf's rope. The General impatiently dismounted, dug a hole with his knife, tore loose a bunch of twigs and grass, knotted the end of the rope about the bunch, buried it and stamped the earth atop it. That was a clever scheme. Terry himself could not budge the anchor. The calf seemed to have given up resistance, and only blatted after his mother—who from a safe distance gazed and answered.

"Calf stay, cow stay," grunted General Jackson, and vaulted on his pony. "Kill 'um buffs? How many?"

"Never killed a one," confessed Terry, picking up his gun and seizing the bridle of the colt. "Couldn't. Buff run, pony 'fraid, no shoot."

"Huh!" commented the General. "Delaware kill plenty, white boy ketch 'um whoa-haw. Good.

Leaving the woolly calf securely tethered they rode slowly forward, to join the other hunters. They passed dead buffalo, some with gun-shot wounds, some with one, two, and three arrows buried in them.

What was to be done with all these buffalo, anyway? The question answered itself, for, un-noted during the excitement, from the hills in the direction of the camp had issued the Delaware women; bringing the horses and children and dogs and all the other equipment they were hastening to the field. With their knives they im-

mediately set to work on the first carcasses that they reached.

About midway of the field the hunters came together. Black Beaver's quiver was entirely empty of fresh arrows, but held two bloody ones that he must have pulled out for re-use! Jim Ned's quiver was almost empty. John Bushman was powder stained, and his left thigh blistered where his hot gun-barrel had rested. The lance of the Shawnee was red from point to end of shaft. They all—and ponies likewise—were very tired, but appeared satisfied.

So they sat down, resting and comparing notes.

Terry wandered about, examining things. Every buffalo was pierced by arrow or lance or ball in practically the one spot—low down just behind the fore shoulder. The arrows were buried to their feathers—and now and then the arrow point had broken through the hide on the opposite side. Black Beaver stepped to a carcass near Terry, and laid hold of an arrow that not only had penetrated through but was dangling two-thirds out. He twitched it forth, showed it to Terry, and rather proudly stowed it in his quiver, indicating that he had drawn the bow which sent it. Whew! Good shooting, that!

The women rapidly approached, working from carcass to carcass. First they forced open the jaws and cut the tongues out by the roots and laid them aside. Then by main strength they turned each buffalo on his back and propped him there by his head and his hump, and slit his hide open and stripped it down. Then they cut off choice pieces of the meat and piled them on the

hide; pretty soon the buffalo was out of his hide and dragged to one side, where the dogs tore at him—even Shep joining, forgetful of the cow.

Ocasionaly a woman split a bone and handed it to one of the children, who sucked out the marrow. General Jackson arose, and stalking over collected several large cracked bones. Returning, he passed them around. Terry was so hungry that he actually tried a taste of the marrow. He found it not so *very* bad, although rather fatty and insipid.

Not nearly all of each buffalo was cut up. The women seemed to have only certain meat and bones in mind. In time there was a great sight, of black heads attached to the red bodies, piles of meat, and quarreling dogs. Whenever an arrow was cut out, the squaw laid it carefully aside.

The meat, on the hides, was dragged to a central location, and the children were stationed to drive away the dogs. A few of the best cow hides were pegged out, flesh side up, to dry; other hides were thrown over the meat, for covering. Fires were made, from dried buffalo chips started with dead grass, and two flints knocked together, and everybody squatted around and roasted buffalo meat, and ate and ate.

Not much more was done by the men, this day, but the women kept busy preparing the meat for packing home. Some of it they cut into long thin strips, and strung by hide thongs between the lean-to poles that they had brought down from the other camp. A few chunks, together with the tongues that were not eaten, were wrapped in the hides and tied securely. But the major portion of the buffalo was wasted.

And that night, around the camp in the open howled an army of wolves.

But before going to bed, Terry went out and got his calf. The mother cow had approached it and was giving it supper, and a good licking over. She was not so pugnacious now, and neither was the calf. She easily tolled her away, in chase of him, while General Jackson showed Terry a new trick.

"Hold 'um by head, blow 'um in nose," he bade. "Calf he follow."

Terry boldly slipped his hands along the calf's back, held the little fellow's head, and blew twice into his quivering nostrils. It seemed to astonish the calf—but when Terry pulled the rope free and led him along, for camp, he trotted obediently right at Terry's heels, as if Terry were his mother!

When he had been tied out again, close to the camp, the mother sidled on and in the dusk joined him.

"Home to-morrow, mebbe," announced General Jackson.

After a heavy supper of more buffalo meat, in spite of the clamor from the wolves the camp slept soundly through the night—so soundly that it did not stir until the sun was well up. Consequently, what with catching the strayed horses, and gathering the partially dried meat and a few hides and packing them, and sorting the arrows and cleaning weapons, etc., etc., not until almost noon did the laden cavalcade start eastward for the hills and the Valley of the Blue beyond.

Terry at the rear of the file of men led the calf (who really did not require leading), the mother cow ambled

anxiously after, and the women, with the packs, followed. Nobody could deny that this had been a successful hunt. Wait till George Stanton heard about it!

So they wended up into the hills. Behind and below remained the buffalo carcasses, to furnish food for the wolves, and skeletons for the information of the next hunters.

The Delaware men had resumed their guns and saddles and customary clothing. Black Beaver of course took the fore. It was wonderful how he guided without any hesitation, always finding the easiest route and steadily gaining ground. But late in the afternoon he suddenly halted, while traversing a little glade, or park. Halted the single column, and then Jim Ned and the other men rode forward to gather beside him. Terry curiously edged on, to learn what was the matter.

The Delawares appeared to be examining something on the ground immediately under their ponies. The ground here was hard, covered with a short turf dried by the summer sun, and for the life of him Terry could not see what they all were looking at. For his benefit General Jackson held up two fingers.

"One 'um, two 'um ponies," he said. "Go that way," and he pointed north. "Mebbe Cheyenne."

The Delawares were much interested in the invisible tracks. They ranged keenly about the glade, inspecting the ground—and next a low call from Black Beaver drew them all, Terry included (dropping his calf rope), a short distance into the timber.

Black Beaver had discovered a spring, and in the

moist soil around it, more prints. But these were visible, even to Terry. There was one distinct print, oblong, over which the Delawares pored earnestly.

"Cheyenne," they said, and all nodded.

Evidently it was a moccasin print. Now the Delawares deliberated together, talking in low tones. Presently they had decided. They all rode back into the glade, where the women, with the packs, waited.

Black Beaver uttered a few words to them.

"Delaware take trail, ketch 'um Cheyenne," remarked General Jackson, to Terry. "Boy stay with women."

"Can't I go?" begged Terry. "See Delaware ketch 'um."

"Huh!" grunted the General, approving. "All right. Leave 'um dog, leave 'um calf. Not far. Ketch 'um quick. Trail two hour old."

"How do you know?" queried Terry.

General Jackson promptly beckoned him aside, and pointed to a bush. A twig, broken by the passage of some heavy body, hung broken.

"No dead," said the General—and sure enough, the leaves on the twig were scarcely withered.

The women had dismounted, as if to make camp. Black Beaver was leading out, the other men fell in line behind him, and with a "Go back!" to the disappointed Shep Terry followed. With all these Delawares chasing two Cheyennes, it did not seem to him that there would be much danger; and besides, he wanted to see what happened. No boy wearing a

panther claw necklace wished to stay in camp with the squaws! Heap war-path, wah!

Black Beaver led rapidly, constantly scrutinizing the ground before, and searching right and left. At the top of every rise he slackened, peering, and he was equally cautious when he approached the open places. But the trail was as plain as paint to him. The other Delawares all rode watchfully; and Terry, in the rear, began to think that maybe this was a serious matter.

The trail proved to be a long one. They rode and they rode, without a halt, up hill and down dale, never minding the deer and the rabbits—until, after the sun had set, in the twilight Black Beaver suddenly stopped short.

The trail of the two horses had merged with a much wider trail that trampled down the brush and tore the sod. It bore off to the left. The two horses must have turned into it, for their tracks did not appear on the other side.

The Delawares consulted here for five minutes. Perhaps they had run into something that they had not expected. At any rate, this was a new phase in the situation to date, and required further planning. Even to Terry the cross trail looked alarming. Many horses had passed.

The Delawares carefully examined, eying the trail itself and the outskirts. Black Beaver dismounted, the closer to scan.

“Heap Cheyenne,” quoth General Jackson, to Terry. “War party; no dog, no lodge, no take ’um squaw; hunt ’um scalp, no hunt ’um buff.”

Black Beaver was in the saddle again, and led off down the trail. The other men followed; so did Terry. The Delawares were going right after them, were they? Now this was decidedly a serious matter. To chase two horses and riders might not be very dangerous, but to chase a whole lot was different. And a war party, too!

Terry reflected that possibly he would have displayed more good sense had he stayed in camp. His mother had not let him come, to mix up in any fights, except to defend himself; and these Cheyennes had not bothered him or the Delawares either. But of course he could not excuse himself and turn back now. He had to stick.

As anybody could see, this was a fresh trail. Broken twigs and bruised leaves and grass were still sappy; and the hoof-prints in the softer sod were still clean and damp. The Delawares rode alertly and steadily. Twilight faded, the dusk gathered, and there were tokens ahead that the trail was about to issue out of the hills and into the Valley of the Republican—or at least, what likely would be the Valley of the Republican, above the place of the buffalo hunt.

The trail was almost obscured by the dusk. The Delawares moved more slowly, down a long draw which formed a pass to the lower country. Under a tree Black Beaver once more halted, and another conference was held. It ended by Black Beaver riding on alone and the other men dismounting and sitting as if to wait for his return. They placidly sat enveloped in their buffalo robes, each holding the end of his pony's

neck rope; and Terry saw nothing to do but to do likewise. So he wrapped his blanket around him, and squatted. It was no time to ask questions.

The horses stood, tired, with drooping heads, and the darkness thickened, while nobody uttered a word. Terry nodded, nodded, tried to keep his eyes open, and must have fallen asleep, after all, for the next thing that he knew, Black Beaver had returned; was getting off his horse, in the darkness, and joining the circle. He may have been gone several hours; there was no means of telling.

Now the Indians put their heads together, after a fashion, and heard his report, and grunted opinions. Black Beaver occasionally gestured and signed. All seemed to understand him perfectly—that is, all but Terry. The discussion apparently was settled to satisfaction. The Delawares rose, unsaddled (Terry promptly did the same), the horses were staked out with the picket ropes to graze, and in the darkness strips of dried venison were chewed, as supper. The strip passed to Terry had been carried inside General Jackson's shirt, but Terry was so hungry that he did not care.

Then everybody went to bed.

"Sleep now, ketch 'um Cheyenne in mornin'," remarked the General, as he stretched himself out in his robe.

"Did Black Beaver find them?" ventured Terry.

"Him see 'um, to-morrow we ketch 'um," replied General Jackson.

"Many?" invited Terry.

“Heaps.”

“Whew!” thought Terry, although he didn’t say it. A pretty outlook this was: a big fight due, between Indians, and he here as a volunteer! The Delawares would doubtless expect a boy with a panther claw necklace to enjoy fighting as much as they did, and to help them out—but if he was killed or taken prisoner, what would become of his mother and the ranch? His mother supposed that he was just on a hunt; she and Harry would much rather have some meat and the cow and the calf, than a scalp—and so, he felt, would he. Shucks! Why couldn’t they all go straight home and leave the Cheyennes alone!

Terry cogitated, without finding any way out, until he slept and began to fight Cheyennes—had a terrible battle. Fortunately he was awakened in the midst of it, by the Delawares moving about. Morning! The sky was paling, the draw had lightened, and the Delawares were stripping for action!

They had taken off their shirts, and sitting with their buffalo robes about their waists were painting their chests and faces. Black Beaver had daubed his breast with black and white circles; and General Jackson already had drawn curious red lines on his cheeks. Somewhat worried, Terry blinked and watched.

The Delawares (including, of course, the Shawnee) finished their decorating, and gravely stood, dropping their buffalo robes from their waists and stepping out of them. Then for the first time General Jackson noted Terry.

“Boy stay. Wait ’um here,” he ordered.

Without another word they saddled up, and gun in hand rode out, in single file, Black Beaver leading down the misty draw. They rode silently, half naked, and in a minute were out of sight.

Terry was left alone, in charge of the discarded clothing. He didn't know whether to be disappointed, or not. No, he wasn't disappointed, exactly. He really had no business in that fight—but he'd like awfully well to see it. Those Delawares were great fighters. They were supposed to be able to whip these plains Indians—although the Cheyennes and the Sioux were great fighters, too. "Heap" Cheyennes, had said General Jackson, but they were going to be surprised while asleep. First thing they knew, the Delawares would be right in among them!

Terry listened and fidgeted. How far was that Cheyenne camp, he wondered. If he sneaked down the trail a little way, maybe he could see the fight, and then he'd know how it came out. So he hastily saddled and bridled the colt, and started on a little scout for information.

Although the draw was slowly clearing, at the approach of day, the stars, above, had not yet wholly disappeared, and on either side the timber lay darkened and brooding. Rabbits hopped, and across the trail slunk a coyote or prairie wolf. As he rode cautiously Terry listened hard, expecting every moment to hear guns and shouts, but never a sound reached him. He had ridden about half a mile, along the trail, and the draw soon would open into whatever was before—or looked as though it would open—when he came to the

place where the Delawares had left the trail. Fresh pony tracks, crushing the dew, branched off to the left, making around a little rise. The foxy Delawares, too, were on the sneak!

Terry decided that he'd get there quicker if he kept to the main trail, as a short cut. Then he could skip back in a hurry. But he had proceeded only a few rods further, when he saw more pony tracks branching off, this time to the right.

Two ponies; might be the very same two that had been followed yesterday! Probably Black Beaver, on his scout last evening, had not come by the main trail to this point, and he had missed these tracks. It was a great opportunity to discover something. The tracks invited aside, to a bunch of scattered timber at the near head of a shallow side draw.

Peering, his heart thumping, Terry rode there, but he did not intend to go far. Just as he reached the grove, and was pausing, to crane his neck, he heard among the trees and brush a rustle and a snort—and he glimpsed a spotted pony staring at him. His colt pricked its ears, and stared back; Terry stared also.

The pony was stripped, and loose—he moved, to graze, and dragged a picket rope. Terry got a full view of him—why, he was George Stanton's pony—George's spotted pony, for there was the diamond brand on his shoulder, and he looked very familiar, anyway!

The Cheyennes had stolen him. This must be looked into. If Terry could get near enough to him to grab that trailing rope—but hold on! watch out for

the thieves; they might be camped close at hand. Terry, eyes and ears alert, slipped from the colt, and with gun ready tiptoed forward.

The gloom amidst the grove had thinned, and he could see clearly among the tree trunks. The pony was suspicious of him—did not want to be caught, yet, and moved, twitching the rope after him. Shucks! Too much noise! Terry paused, glancing keenly around—and stiffened. Beyond, wrapped in buffalo robes on the ground under a tree, figures were lying, asleep. They were only about thirty yards away. And there was another pony, picketed but staring.

Jiminy! Down sank Terry, heart thumping again. The prone figures made two lumps. One lump had two heads, the other lump was covered completely, but somehow it *looked* Indian. Those two heads—and Terry carefully circuted, stooping, to get a better sight. One head was yellowish, with long hair; the other head was black—and he could see the faces. They were white! Why—George Stanton and Virgie Stanton, sure as sure! And they were captives.

Never had Terry thought so fast, as in the next minute. He couldn't shoot blindly into that other buffalo robe; he didn't know who was inside and nobody likes to shoot somebody asleep. In fact, Terry didn't desire to shoot *anybody*. But he must get George and Virgie away, out of there, before the figure in the other robe woke; and if he didn't hurry, the battle would break loose and *that* would wake folks in a jiffy.

First he tiptoed swiftly back to the colt and tied the bridle lines to a bush, to make sure of *him*. Then he

stole forward, for the figures—put the trunk of their tree between him and them, and sneaked until he reached it. Yes, George and Virgie those were, sound asleep and now almost within reach of his hand, on the other side of the tree trunk. The figure under the second buffalo robe had not stirred, either.

Pshaw, if George only *would* wake. But if he was touched he might wake with a jump, and Virgie would cry, and——! And if he was called to, the other figure might hear. Let's see—and suddenly Terry had it. He'd rattle! He'd rattle his Brotherhood token, of course. That was the signal agreed on. George would recognize, and if the other figure heard he wouldn't suspect anything special. Rattlesnakes were common, to Indians.

Terry cautiously extracted his snake rattles from under his shirt, and squeezing them tightly so as not to sound them too soon, extended his hand and gently rattled in George's ear. George's eyes popped open—he blinked, startled—and he saw Terry motioning at him from behind the tree. He looked funny, for a moment, but he didn't move; and Terry beckoned.

George scowled and shook his head.

"Can't," he formed, with his lips.

"Come on!" urged Terry.

"Can't," answered George—and on the instant the timber echoed to a vigorous chorus of gun-shots and wild, shrill war-whoops! The Delawares and the Cheyennes were fighting!

That was what Terry had feared. He boldly sprang out with his gun, and only just in time, for the other

buffalo robe flew apart, as the figure inside it scrambled to stand up. "Bang!" exploded one barrel of Terry's gun, into the air—and he yelled with all his might, a regular Indian yell.

The figure was that of an Indian; and how he did run! At a single bound, like a deer breaking covert, he was into the air and next into the brush—doubling and crashing through amidst the trees.

Whooping, Terry followed, a few steps, and sent the contents of the second barrel rattling after him, to keep him moving. He was Thunder Horse, the Kiowa. Only a glimpse of his ugly face had been given, but that was enough.

Terry ran back to George and Virgie. He found them sitting up, George pale and Virgie frightened half to death.

CHAPTER XVI

SHEP TO THE FORE AGAIN

"Get up, quick!" bade Terry, breathless. "Hurry, George, before he comes back."

"I can't," retorted George. "We're tied."

So he was—hands and feet, as he kicked off the buffalo robe. And so was Virgie. She began to cry.

"Be quiet, Virgie," ordered George.

"Oh, shucks!" exclaimed Terry; and down on his knees he flopped and slashed with his knife at the thongs which bound wrists and ankles.

"Did you hit him?" queried George, as he tottered up and lifted Virgie.

"Don't think so."

"Wish you had. Didn't he leg it, though! What's that other shooting?"

"The Delawares are fighting the Cheyennes. We thought you were a Cheyenne. Wait till I load."

"Where's my horse?" demanded George. "We've got to have a horse. He ran off. I'll take this other." And for it he hobbled.

"All right. Make yonder," directed Terry, at top speed reloading his shot-gun.

George grabbed up the buffalo robe (he never

missed much, did George!) and seized the picket rope of Thunder Horse's pony.

"Here! You take this robe, Virgie," he ordered. "I don't leave my saddle, you bet!"

Lugging saddle and bridle, and tugging the pony, with Virgie stoutly dragging the buffalo robe and Terry forming rear-guard—his eyes and ears searching for sign of Thunder Horse sneaking back—they fled for the colt, and the trail beyond. The spotted pony snorted as they approached him. Lucky that the colt was tied.

"Where now?" demanded George, panting, his eyes snapping.

"You saddle up—any way, just so the saddle sticks on," puffed Terry. "Got to ride up the trail about half a mile—to camp."

He watched for Thunder Horse among the trees—didn't see him—while George slung the saddle on over the buffalo robe, hastily fastened it, after a fashion, clapped on the bridle without inserting the bit (any old way did), lifted Virgie aboard and clambered to place before her.

Instantly Terry was aboard the colt, and back-tracking for the trail in the draw. Once into the open, away they pelted, up the draw—and with a whinny the spotted pony followed after.

"Dandy's coming, too," piped Virgie. "Will that mean Injun catch us?"

"Can't. He hasn't any horse," encouraged George. "Good for Dandy!"

"Won't he run and catch us?" persisted Virgie.

"No. Terry'll shoot him."

"I lost my sunbonnet," whimpered little Virgie.

"We can't get it now. You can keep this buffalo robe," comforted George.

"How long did he have you? Where'd he find you?" asked Terry, as they galloped on, George striving to urge his pony alongside.

"Just since yesterday noon. Jumped out on us on our way back from Manhattan and hustled us over here. I didn't have eggs or anything to beat him off with."

"Any Cheyennes with him?"

"No."

"But the Delawares said those were Cheyenne moccasin tracks: two ponies and Cheyenne moccasin prints."

"Guess he must be wearing Cheyenne moccasins, then. He had on new ones."

They had reached the night's camp under the tree. The robes and shirts were here, just as left. Terry reined in the colt and tumbled off.

"We'd better stop here," he ordered.

"Thought you said 'camp'," uttered George. "Where are your Delawares?"

"Out fighting the Cheyennes. Got to wait for 'em."

"But supposing Thunder Horse comes. He might sneak up on us, with his gun, as soon as he finds out how he was attacked."

"Then we ought to tie our horses and climb a tree," proposed Terry. "We can see from there; and he wouldn't think to look up into the trees."

"All right. See him first, too, and pepper him," agreed George—who had no small reason to be indignant. "Wish I could catch Dandy. But he'll stay 'round."

They tied the two horses, boosted Virgie to the first branch of the tree, whence she climbed like a squirrel, George swarmed after, and handing up his gun Terry followed. Now they were safe above ground, and concealed by the leafy boughs could wait and listen and peer.

"The fighting's quit," whispered George.

So it had, barring a single shot, now and then, in the distance. Not another sound was to be heard. The horses dozed below. The sun had risen and was striking through with his first beams.

"How many Delawares?" whispered George.

"Five."

"How many Cheyennes?"

"Heaps. You saw that trail."

"Wonder who licked."

"Delawares, of course."

"I want to go home," piped Virgie.

"Sh!" cautioned George. "Injun hear you!"

But which *had* licked, reflected Terry. Supposing it was the Cheyennes! And supposing they'd come this way, searching for more Delawares! Huh! They'd see the horses, and look up into the tree, and what would he and George do?

"Hungry," piped Virgie.

"Sh, now!" warned George, again. "Don't believe Thunder Horse is trailing us," he whispered, hopefully, to Terry. "You scared him out."

"We can't tell," whispered back Terry.

"That was awful smart of you, anyway, to use that rattle," mused George. "I knew right away it was a Brotherhood signal."

They sat silent, waiting. All shooting had ceased, and the draw and timber basked peacefully in the morning sun. A belated rabbit hopped about, in plain sight, near, browsing and scratching.

"There isn't any Indian down there or that rabbit wouldn't be so bumptious," reasoned George. "Horses don't smell anything, either."

"Guess that's so," admitted Terry. "Look out—Virgie's going to sleep. She'll fall off."

"I'll hold her on," and George steadied her.

The minutes passed.

"Listen!" whispered Terry.

Somebody was coming—several somebodies. Soft hoof thuds could be heard, down the draw; voices—and laughter. Rounding a clump of high brush the Delawares appeared, Black Beaver leading, followed by General Jackson and the rest driving before them half a dozen loose horses. They all were there, the five of them, and they acted with the good humor of victors.

"That's they!" yelled Terry. "Now we're all right. Come on."

Black Beaver had instantly sighted George's spotted pony, and the pony of Thunder Horse, besides the colt—and halted sharply, in alarm. But out from the tree plumped Terry, gladly landing a-sprawl; down slid George, helping the sleepy Virgie.

"Where ketch 'um?" demanded General Jackson.

"Ketch 'um from Thunder Horse," informed Terry.
"He ketch 'um first, I ketch 'um next."

"Where him?" demanded General Jackson, his eyes darting in search. "Mebbe you kill 'um?"

"No. Run."

"That's his pony, though," piped Virgie. "He ran off because he was afraid and we took his pony and his buffalo robe and we aren't going to give them back because he stole us."

"Did you lick the Cheyennes?" asked George.

"Humph! Cheyenne run, too," grunted the General.

"I don't see any scalps, do you?" said George, to Terry.

There was no time here for explanations. The Delawares now were evidently in a great hurry. They speedily gathered their few belongings, George managed to lay his hands on Dandy's trailing picket rope. With George bareback, Virgie on the Thunder Horse pony and Terry on his colt, the whole party lined out for the spot where the Delaware women were waiting.

But this gave Terry and George an opportunity to swap stories. George thought that Terry should have killed some buffalo, but he agreed that the cow and the calf were a great find.

"Expect she's some emigrant cow who strayed off and joined the buffalo," he said. "Your mother'll be mighty glad, won't she! Didn't you get anything else, on your hunt?"

"Got a big buck—shot him running, too. I could

have got a doe that General Jackson bleated for, but I wouldn't shoot at her. Then the General shot, and missed; and that made him mad, so he went off by himself and shot one anyhow."

"What's bleating?" queried George.

"I'll show you. We'll make a bleater and learn how. Say," Terry added. "Expect your folks will be mighty glad to see you and Virgie."

"I guess so," nodded George, gravely. "That Kiowa must have counted on holding us captive for ransom. Of course I couldn't get away from him without Virgie. When he turned us into that big Indian trail I thought we were goners, sure, but he just followed it far enough to spy out who they were and then he quit it and made his own camp. He's a sort of an outlaw."

"It's lucky you weren't in that Cheyenne camp," reasoned Terry, "or when the Delawares attacked it you'd have been carried off scoting."

"Yes, and it's lucky you found us before the battle broke loose, or you might not have found us at all. You were smart to hustle. Maybe pa'll let me get my pistol fixed, now, with a real hammer. Then I'd like to see any old Kiowa tackle *me*," and George wagged his head vengefully. "I wasn't afraid, though, except for Virgie. She's too little to join the Injuns. I could have run away, the first chance I got."

The Delaware women were waiting. They did not seem at all excited. They had meat cooking, as if they knew that their warriors would be hungry, and they only broadly smiled when they saw George and Virgie,

and the captured horses. Shep was the excited one. For him it had been an anxious wait.

Now everybody, including the hungry Virgie, whom Mrs. Black Beaver at once took in charge, fell to and ate. From what Terry could gather, the battle was a great victory for the Delawares—although as far as he learned nobody had been hurt. The Cheyennes had scampered in a panic, when they were surprised, and the Delawares had seized some loose ponies and had wisely retired while they could.

Now after breakfast (or was it dinner?) they washed off their war paint, and Black Beaver led out again, for home.

“Hope we strike our place,” voiced Terry, as the cavalcade filed down into the Valley of the Blue.

“And then go on down to ours,” added George. “Won’t our folks’ eyes stick out!”

And indeed, with the Indians, and the loose horses, and the laden horses, and the cow and the half-buffalo calf, and the two boys, and Virgie (who led the calf, as a privilege), the procession made quite a sight.

Sure enough, toward evening the Richards’ ranch was sighted, before; and while Terry’s mother stood watching, from the cabin door, and Harry came limping hastily from the chores, the successful party bore straight for the yard.

“For goodness’ sake!” exclaimed Terry’s mother, as they halted and she hurried forward. “You are back, aren’t you! Oh, but I’m glad! Where did you find George and Virgie?”

“Where’d you get the cow?” called Harry. “And that calf!”

"Found 'em. Found George and Virgie, too. I'll tell you all about it."

"A bad Injun had us," piped Virgie. "And Terry scared him away."

"I declare!"

There was time for only a kiss and a hug; the Delawares were unpacking some of the meat, as if wishing to be away. With Terry, Harry helped pile it at one side. From his saddle, General Jackson patted Terry on the shoulder.

"Heap boy," he said. "Ketch 'um cow, ketch 'um calf, ketch 'um white boy, ketch 'um white girl, scare 'um Kiowa. Go again, mebbe."

When the Delawares rode off, escorting George and Virgie, they left a lot of venison and buffalo meat, three buffalo robes, the cow and the calf, of course, and at parting General Jackson thrust a small object into Terry's hand.

"Learn 'um bleat, then ketch 'um deer easy," he spoke.

It was his bleater. He may have heard Terry and George talking. Terry was immensely glad to have it, for he wasn't certain that he could make one without a model.

"What's that, Terry?" queried his mother.

"It's a deer call, ma. I'll show you—" proffered Terry, excited.

But his mother uttered a little shriek.

"Don't put that to your mouth, Terry! Please don't! I'll give it a good wash with soap and water.

All right. But Terry believed that if his mother had

been out with Indians for a while, and had done as they had done, she wouldn't be so particular.

With the Delawares George and Virgie had ridden gaily down the valley, for home. Now the booty of the hunt was to be attended to, at once. The meat and the robes were welcome, but the greatest prize was the cow and the calf. When they had been safely landed in the corral, for the night, Terry's mother was still exclaiming over them.

"To think, that we have a cow—at least, till the owner claims her! The calf is old enough to be weaned; and then there'll be plenty of milk, and I can make butter! Oh, Terry, how did you ever do it?"

This was part of the long story to be told at supper. In the evening Mr. Stanton rode over, to thank Terry for the prompt rescue of George and Virgie. He and Harry looked the cow over; decided that there was small chance of anybody claiming her, at this late day; and that perhaps the calf could be broken to pull. He was a sturdy little rascal; he'd probably always look like a buffalo.

So, with a cow and calf added to its stock, the ranch felt very prosperous. The hay and corn and oats were all doing well; the garden was booming—such tender beans and sweet beets and young potatoes; there was the bee tree, waiting to contribute to "milk and honey"; and there was the deer bleat, in case the table ran entirely out of meat.

Terry was not certain that he could stand it to shoot a mother doe, after he had called her up; seemed to him like murder; but he and George were anxious to

learn how to bleat, if only for fun. Harry, who was clever, made a bleater for George, patterned on the General Jackson bleater, and they all tried, in spare moments, until Terry's mother and George's mother declared that the sounds were worse than a flock of geese.

August arrived, and opened scorching hot. The oats were nodding, the corn was ripened, the hay was ready to cut. Meanwhile Harry and Terry were busy with saw and ax down in the timber. But before pitching into the hay, Harry decided that they'd cut down the bee tree, and have that much fun, at least. There'd be no time, a little later.

George rode over, on the Indian pony, and Virgie with him, on Dandy (who was now hers), for the event. But Virgie, when she understood that these were "stinging" bees, and might object to being robbed of their honey, stayed at the house. With the ax, and all the pails and pans they could gather, the three others trudged down to the timber.

The timber was cool, as compared with the prairie. The bees were as busy as ever, storing their honey. Harry surveyed their hole, and the trunk, and scratched his nose.

"It's hollow, and will die anyway," he remarked. "We can use it for fire-wood. And the bees have three months yet to rustle in. So down she comes. You boys be making a smudge. I'm going to fall her in that open space."

He lustily swung the ax—every stroke biting out a

chip. The tree, echoing hollowly, trembled, and the bees above buzzed, much annoyed.

"Get a lot of rotten wood and damp stuff," bade George. "I'll start the fire. And when she falls, make a rush for her with the smudge."

"How?"

"Carry the fire to the hole on a piece of bark," said George. "But we want to be lively."

"Oh, you'll be lively enough," panted Harry. "I'd advise you to have some branches handy, till the smoke gets to working."

The fire was started on a large piece of wet bark; the punky stuff was made ready. Thwack, thwack, sounded the methodical blows of Harry's ax. He had notched the tree on the side toward which it was to fall, and was sending wedge-shaped chips flying.

"He's a first-class chopper, isn't he!" praised George, who had viewed him with critical eye.

"There's nothing like knowing how," panted Harry.

In the heart the tree was soft; and having cut half-way through, Harry changed to the opposite side. Already the tree was creaking ominously.

"Watch out. Stand aside," cautioned Harry, as he plied the ax. "When she falls she'll fall with a rush."

"Right in the open place?" asked Terry.

"Right in the open place, unless she catches and swerves. Don't you take any chances."

"And be ready with the smudge," reminded George.

The tree began to lean—crackled sharply—Harry delivered one last blow and sprang back—the tree wavered—settled—and down it came, with a magnificent

crash, leaving a trail of bees in the air. It landed smack in the open place. Shep, who had stretched himself to sleep, up-jumped in alarm, but forward dashed the two boys, branches in one hand, fire and punk in the other.

"Where's the hole?" cried George, holding the fire. "I see it! Look out for the bees. Oh, jiminy! Protect me, can't you? You swat while I smudge."

There was nothing cowardly about George; no. Into the boughs he charged, tripping and diving, and recklessly planted his barkful of fire beside the hole. The bees were clustered thick about it, and were swarming out and buzzing wildly.

"Swat 'em! Swat 'em!" implored George, stooping low and blowing the fire and piling on smudge stuff.

Terry, standing over, to protect, valiantly lashed around with his leafy branch. Harry, panting and resting, cheered laughingly—while Shep, who also had rushed in, looking for a coon or a squirrel, uttered a sudden yelp and beat retreat, his tail between his legs.

However, the battle with the bees was soon over. The great majority of the bees stayed high aloft, looking for their hole which had so miraculously vanished. Those lower avoided the smudge smoke; and those about the hole fell off, to wander stupidly or else to dart away in disgust.

"Didn't get stung once; did you?" asked George, venturing to straighten up.

"Only once on the ear," answered Terry. "But I didn't feel it. Feel it now, though."

Harry had advanced into the smoke, and began to chop open the hole. At the first stroke, his ax sank in

to the butt; and by driving wedges they easily split the thin core. The hollow extended for six feet and was packed with comb—some of it black and old and waxy, but the greater portion oozing with the lucent sweetness.

“Cracky! There must be several bushels of it!” exclaimed George.

They scooped comb and honey both into their pails and pans, and made triumphant procession back up to the house; emptied their loads into a wash boiler, and toiled down for more. By the time they had pretty well scraped the cavity, they all were hot and sticky, not to speak of being thoroughly smoked.

“I feel like a sugar cured ham,” asserted George. “I’d like to jump in that creek, if I wasn’t afraid I’d melt.”

“Good!” approved Harry. “We’ll all take a swim. Got time enough before dinner. That’s the only way we’ll ever get clean. You fellows be peeling off, and I’ll take the rest of the honey on up so Mother Richards can be straining it, and come back.”

That was the way with Harry: he always urged the others on to have fun, while he finished the work.

Away he limped, lugging the two pails; and with a “Come on” to George and Shep, Terry struck through the timber for the creek. The water called powerfully.

The best swimming-place was about 300 yards distant, where the creek made a bend into the timber; with grassy banks in sun and in shade, one bank high and level, the other shelving to gravelly shallows. A fellow could swim and dive in the water up to his neck,

along the high bank, or he could tear about and run races through the shallows. So it was a splendid swimming hole.

They peeled off in a hurry, on the high bank, and with a running jump plumped in. Ah, but this was glorious. The water was just right. Shep dropped down near the clothes, in the shade, and took another snooze.

They had been in the creek about half an hour, doing all kinds of things, when Terry suddenly remembered.

"Wonder why Harry doesn't come."

"Dunno," sputtered George, standing up. "Must be helping your mother. That's like him."

"Want to go out?"

"No. He said he'd come."

"I tell you," spoke Terry: "let's put on our shirts and go up to the deer drinking place and bleat. He'll know where we are."

"Haven't got my bleater," objected George. "It's at home."

"I've got mine," persisted Terry. "I've learned how to bleat fine."

"Shucks!" scoffed George. "You can't fool a deer now. The fawns are too big to bleat much. There wouldn't be any deer around, either, after this noise."

"There might," persisted Terry. "They lie close this time of day, and you can hardly budge them. And some fawns are born late."

So they hauled on their shirts, Terry fished his bleater out of his trousers pocket, and bare-legged

they went up to the deer drinking place. Shep dawdled after, to see what was going on.

At a low spot the deer had made a narrow trail to the water's edge, where they stole down out of the timber and brush, to drink, and to cross over if they felt like it. The boys crouched behind a low tree, and Terry began to bleat his best.

The timber was quiet. The bleat sounded clearly, and to Terry very natural—almost like General Jackson's bleat. But George was particular.

"That's not it," he whispered. "You're too loud."

"Wait, now," bade Terry. He modulated the notes, a little—and struck the exact pitch. Never had he bleated so well.

"Let me try," invited George, in low tone, as Terry finally paused to rest his mouth. Terry obligingly passed the bleater to him. George did well, too. If there was any mother deer near, she'd certainly be interested.

"Got to make it sound frightened. Here—I'll show you," whispered Terry, taking the bleater again.

He bleated industriously. Now and then he quit, while they peered and listened. They bleated and re-bleated for some time. No deer.

"Let's go," whispered George. "Flies are eating me up," and he cautiously scratched his bare shanks. "Jiminy, how they bite!"

But Terry suddenly nudged him.

"Sh! One's coming! Look at Shep."

Shep, who had been sleepily gazing about, and nodding between times, beside them, had raised his head.

His ears were pricked—he was sniffing and staring, and the bristles on his back were rising.

Terry bleated more agonizedly. This was exciting. No deer was in sight, but Shep certainly smelled something—and, yes, he saw something, right yonder. His eyes were fixed and wide. They glowed, and he slowly stood—stiffened, with every hair erect. He growled, low and deep.

“Shep! Down!” whispered Terry. “No!”

George, too, stiffened, gazing where Shep was gazing.

“Terry!” he gasped, under his breath. “Oh, gee! Look! I see it! Quit—it’s a panther. We’ve called a panther!”

Terry saw, also—his bleater silent at his lips. Less than thirty yards before and a little at one side, an unmistakable long tawny shape, close to the ground, slunk swiftly from tree to tree, heading straight for them. He was seeking the fawn.

With frightened impulse Terry sprang upright, and shouted frantically, waving his arms. The panther momentarily stared, gave a great leap and disappeared into a bunch of brush. Shep whined impatient.

“Is he gone?” queried George.

No—there he was, closer; slinking as elusive as a shadow, from covert to covert, bent upon locating that fawn. Vainly George joined with Terry in shouting. He disappeared—perhaps he was gone, at last; but watch Shep—Shep still saw him; and there he was, again, boldly in the open. He had made a half-circuit of the ambush, had determined that no two boys, bare-

legged in their shirts, should balk him of the fawn; and crouching flat, stomach to sod, was creeping forward.

He was almost within striking distance. They could see his eyes shine greenly; his fangs bared in a snarl whenever they shouted; his long tail twitch and his hind quarters quiver while his claws gripped the ground.

"Shall we run?" asked George, striving to hold his voice steady.

"No; he'd catch us." For what chance had two half-naked boys, with a panther at their backs?

"Make for the creek."

Then——

"Shep!" implored Terry, frenzied with new fear. "Here! Shep!"

"Oh, thunder!" gasped George.

But they could do nothing. Out had stalked Shep—brave old Shep—and stiff-legged, head and tail low, the bristles on his back up-standing like a mane, growling with a constant deep-throated rumble, had advanced into the open to fight in their defence. All Terry's desperate entreaties and commands could not turn him. He knew his duty.

So they could only watch—did not dare to sick him—it would be cruel to sick him, for what dog could whip a big tom panther? And Shep needed no sicking. Terry felt George trembling with excitement, and wondered if it would be wicked to pray that Shep be the victor.

Steadily Shep stalked forward, careful step by care-

ful step. The great cat settled lower still, his ears flattened to nothing, his tail tip swished from side to side, his eyes fairly blazed, and with open mouth he snarled viciously.

Now scarce ten yards separated them—on a sudden Shep's deep growl swelled to a roar and he charged. With a shrill scream the panther bounded high, met him, they clinched, and went tumbling over and over along the ground

CHAPTER XVII

A PLAGUE FROM THE SKIES

THE sod and twigs flew, spattering the two boys as standing, fascinated and helpless, they danced up and down and at last cheered Shep on.

“Get him, Shep! Sick! Good Shep! Sick! Sick! Chew him, boy!”

Terry was wild to rush in and help, but he and George were bare legged, and not a stick of any size met their frantic gaze.

Over and over rolled the fighters—first Shep’s shaggy form would appear, as he hung fast and slashed and tore; then the writhing, kicking, tawny form of the cat. What a medley of growls and snarls, of throaty barks and high screams, made all the timber echo!

Abruptly Shep came flying out of the fracas. Right through the air he was hurled, by a terrific kick from the panther’s powerful hind legs. He landed in a heap, and hastily scrambled to his feet. His sides were streaked with red where the cat’s long claws had ripped, and a fore leg was bitten through and through. For a moment he stood panting and whining. The panther again crouched, lashing with his tail and snarling in

high, rasping tone, while his eyes burned green. He, too, was bleeding; an ear dripped, and the hide around his throat and neck was torn open by Shep's worrying teeth.

"Shep! Here!" implored the boys. But before Terry could rush out to grab him by the collar, he had pluckily charged. He circled and recircled, darting in and out while ever the cat turned to face him. For this was Shep's way of fighting—springing and slashing, wolf-like. And then they closed. The panther was too quick for him, with a lightning spring had seized him, dragged him down, and clasping him with the fore legs bit and chewed, and ripped with the hind legs.

Over and over they rolled again, in furious struggles and horrid noise of growls and snarls. How the panther kicked and bit! He was stronger than Shep—and this was a fight to a finish. Shep surely was a gone dog. He seemed to be growing weaker. Oh, for a club—for any way to help him! Terry was trembling and heart-sick. If he had on his shoes he would have bolted in and used them—would have done some kicking, himself.

The panther now appeared to be clinging closer and working harder; Shep strove only feebly, as he was being dragged lower and lower. George moaned despairingly.

"He's being killed!" he gasped.

But see! With a thud of rapid feet, and a quick cry: "Look out! Shep! Hold him, Shep!" Harry had arrived, on the run. The ax was in his hand—and in one jump he reached the writhing, tumb-

ling bunch. For a moment he poised, ax lifted, waiting a chance. It came, when just for an instant the bunch stilled, as Shep collapsed and the cat kicked and worried. Down swooped the ax, smashing with dull sound into the tawny body, crouched with Shep underneath. Clean upon the tense back, between the shoulders, it landed. Harry sprang aside for another blow. The panther stiffened, and bloody head tossing loosely went twisting and kicking, now regardless of Shep.

Harry followed, watching his chance while he kept clear of the claws. Suddenly he struck again, and again and again. The panther's strangled yowls subsided, and he lay stretched and quivering, a gory mass of hide and flesh, his teeth still bared in a last snarl.

Harry paused, white and panting. But without waiting to thank him, Terry darted, weak-kneed, for Shep.

"Shep! Poor old Shep!"

Shep was there, where the final grip on him had been broken. He could not stand. He had sunk down, with his four legs sprawled beneath him, and his nose pathetically extended along the ground. He crawled a few inches, at the sound of his master's voice, and sank again. His eyes were closed, but he tried to wag his tail. That was a good sign.

They all bent over him.

"Shep! Good doggie! Brave doggie!"

"Will he die?" quavered Terry.

"Let's see," bade Harry.

"Jiminy, but he's cut!" stammered George.

They tenderly examined Shep, who submitted to their

touches as if he knew what was being done. One fore leg was gashed and bitten through and through; his collar was bitten, also, and there were tooth holes in his neck; the panther's claws had torn his shoulders, with their grip, and had ploughed deep furrows along his sides and stomach. One ear hung useless, chewed to ribbons. But——

"No, he won't die," asserted Harry. "Good! See? Those are all flesh-wounds. Maybe his ear is broken; can't tell. His leg isn't broken, though. Let's get some water and wash him off."

"You think he'll get well?"

"Sure. In two weeks he'll be ready for another tussle. Won't you, Shep, old boy?"

Shep opened his eyes, wagged his tail, and licked Terry's hand. Away raced Terry and George for the creek, and raced back with water in their hats. By this time Shep was trying to stand up; did stand up, on shaky legs; shook himself, and licked some of his bites; did not particularly want to be washed—although he submitted to being fussed over and seemed to appreciate the attention; sneezed; sighted the panther's body, and growling hobbled forward; circled gingerly, one ear pricked and nose sniffing—and stalking closer, smelled of the carcass, and growled over it. Then he sat down and licked his wounds, while watching his enemy.

"He's all right," assured Harry.

"You came just in time, though," said George.

"I shouldn't wonder. Just in time for Shep, anyway."

"Maybe the panther would have got us, too," hazarded Terry. "He was awful mad."

"Funny why he would have attacked you," said Harry, now less white.

"We were bleating for deer. He thought we had a fawn," explained Terry.

"Oh, I see."

"You came quick when you did come," exclaimed Terry. "We didn't have a thing to help Shep with—not even a stick. Whew!"

"I might not have had anything, either, if I'd come sooner, as I expected to," said Harry. "But when I found your clothes I heard this bawling and fighting, and ran for the ax."

"Now you belong to our clan," declared George, warmly. "Doesn't he, Terry! He's a brother. He needn't get any rattles, first. He can wear a panther claw necklace like yours."

"No, Shep ought to wear the claws. He's entitled to be a member in very high standing," asserted Harry. "Aren't you, Shep? Besides, I have my own badge. That's why I didn't get here sooner: stopped to kill a tremendous big rattler, on my way from the house. He had his thirteen rattles. I've got 'em in my pocket, to save 'em till I deserved to be in the brotherhood."

"How'd you kill him?"

"Held him down with a forked stick and hammered his head with my shoe," cheerfully responded Harry.

"Shake," invited George.

Harry shook hands with him and Terry.

"Now let's take Shep home. If he can't walk we'll

carry him. You other brothers had better put on your clothes, hadn't you?"

"What'll we do with the panther?" demanded Terry. "Cracky, but he's a big fellow. Must be the husband of the one I shot last spring."

"His hide's no good, though," spoke George. "And his head's smashed. Look where Shep chewed him, too!"

They surveyed the lax, gory body of the panther.

"We'll haul him home," proposed Terry. "And cut out his claws."

"Won't your mother be scared?"

"We'll tell her not to look."

"All right," agreed Harry. "It's dinner time, anyway. You hustle on your clothes, and I'll be cutting a grape vine for a tow."

They hustled. When they got back, Harry already had the panther carcass in leash. Shep refused to be carried; probably it hurt his wounds. So Harry dragged the panther, George bore the ax, Terry followed ready to help Shep, and Shep hobbled, occasionally shaking his sore ear, in the rear.

Thus they made for home: crossed the creek and emerged from the timber and brush, into the hot prairie—when George exclaimed.

"Look at the smoke, yonder! Prairie fire!"

"Oh, thunder!" gasped Terry. Up into the horizon on the west had welled a hazy cloud, and the wind was blowing straight from that direction.

"Great Cæsar!" mused Harry, who never got excited. "We ought to have ploughed a fire strip, on

that side. But those hills never have burned over. Maybe they'll stop it. Grass there is short."

"We can fight it with wet sacks and send it 'round us, can't we?" panted Terry, as they quickened their pace.

"Then it'll go down to our place," asserted George. "Maybe I ought to be getting home."

They hastened. The cabin was in plain sight, with Mrs. Richards waiting for them. Now she came out, and she, too, began to gaze at the cloud. Already the sun was dimming. The cloud had wafted forward with astonishing rapidity.

"Don't smell it yet, do you?" queried Harry.

"Mighty funny looking cloud," said George. "Looks like a snow storm. See it twinkle?"

"A snow storm in August!" scoffed Terry. "'D rather have that than a fire, though."

Yes, the sun was veiled, for the forward edge of the cloud had reached to mid-sky, overhead. And a strange cloud it was—moving swiftly, with the wind, and shot through with flashes and twinkles. Behind it was a clear space—and then another cloud, similar, following fast. Even the cattle were standing with heads lifted, curious, and the chickens and Pete the turkey were running about and chattering.

All the sky was darkened, when towing the panther they three, and Shep, arrived.

"What *have* you got now?" greeted Mrs. Richards. "Oh, goodness! Another panther! But have you noticed the sky? Is that smoke, do you think? Is there a fire?"

"Listen!" bade George, excited. "Hear it crackle? If you don't need me I'd better bee-line for home."

"I'm afraid," whimpered Virgie, all sticky with honey. "I'm not afraid of the panther, but I'm afraid of the sky. Will we be burned up?"

"Look at the chickens!"

"Ouch!" cried Terry. "It's hail. Something hit me. Oh, Christmas! There's another!"

"Grasshoppers!" fairly yelped Harry. "It's a grasshopper cloud!"

"For mercy-sakes-alive!" uttered Mother Richards. She threw her apron over her head and beat retreat to the cabin. So did Virgie. The cloud was dropping grasshoppers. By scores they fell—plump! They landed everywhere, striking hard against the cabin, against the earth, against Terry and George and Harry, against the animals, against whatever happened to be in their path. Immediately they landed, they righted themselves and crawled, to settle upon the first green thing and eat.

The horses threw up their heads and snorted, stung by the hurling bodies. Shep put his tail down and bolted for shelter. The chickens and Pete ran wildly about, swallowing the hoppers as fast as they could grab. Birds were flocking—descending from the cloud with the falling insects: snapping them in mid-flight and pecking them off the ground.

"That's what we heard—their wings!" cried George. "Their wings crackled! 'Tisn't fire."

"Great Cæsar's ghost!" gasped Harry. "They'll eat up the whole ranch. We've got to help the chickens.

Never mind those on the ground. 'Tend to the garden."

"Step on 'em! Squash 'em!" encouraged Terry; and for the garden they rushed.

Harry paused to seize a broom. He threshed about, knocking the hoppers from the garden leaves, and smashing them; George and Terry kicked and trod and beat with sticks. It seemed a hopeless task, but the cloud had passed, leaving only a small portion of its swarm.

"There comes the other cloud," suddenly panted George, as they worked.

"If that lands——!" groaned Harry.

They stared in dismay. The cloud was low—much lower than the preceding. The sound of the papery wings drifted in advance, on the breeze. Sweeping lower, and lower, it sped across the valley and in a moment more it struck. Never was hailstorm thicker. The three workers were blinded. They could not see. The chickens, and Pete, already gorged, fluttered, yelling, for cover.

"Run!" gasped Terry. "Make for the cabin."

They dropped their tools and ran, shielding their eyes. At every step they crunched hoppers; the ground was slippery with the creatures. Into the cabin they fled. Those crawling, spiky legs on a fellow's neck were not pleasant to feel.

Mrs. Richards and Virgie were exclaiming and closing the window shutters.

"They're coming right down the chimney!" accused

Mother Richards. "And they'll eat everything. What shall we do?"

Coming down the chimney they were! Crawling over the floor! Squeezing in under the shutters! Mother Richards and Virgie shook their skirts and stamped. But this was not the worst.

"Just look outside," bade Harry.

From the door, opened a crack, they peered. Why, the whole landscape was a-crawl! Hundreds—thousands—*millions* of grasshoppers! They actually covered the ground, and the buildings as well.

"Hear 'em eat?" whispered George. And sure enough, there was a steady sound like the crinkle of tissue paper. The grasshoppers' jaws, cutting and munching!

"Well," sighed Harry, "there go our corn and oats, not to speak of the garden."

"Will they eat panther?" piped Virgie—for the panther body was a mass of them.

"Shouldn't wonder," answered Harry.

"Suppose they're as bad down at our place," faltered George. "I'm sorry for you folks, though. Ought to put that pony under cover," he added; and out he ran, dodging and fighting and slipping.

The spotted pony on which little Virgie had ridden over was tugging at his picket rope. The air by this time was well cleared of the falling hoppers; George grasped the picket rope, tore it loose and by it led the pony to the corral—actually waded in the hoppers—and in haste turned the pony loose. The pony immediately headed in under the shed, where

he shook himself and snorted. George scampered back, leaving his own pony.

"They're eating the saddle, too, I guess," he said. "But I can't help that. I'm not going out there again! The Indian pony doesn't act afraid, yet."

For three hours the grasshoppers stayed. There was no use trying to have dinner—too many grasshoppers in the cabin. Some even got into the honey, much to Mother Richards' dismay. Then, shortly after noon, as if by a signal the hoppers rose, and in a dense mass flew away, leaving only a scattering of stragglers.

They flew because there was nothing more here to eat. What a sight presented itself, when a person could venture out! The ground was absolutely bare. The garden was eaten to the roots; the oats had disappeared; the cornfield was only a stubble of short stalks; the panther carcass had been stripped of hair and considerable flesh; George's saddle was gnawed and scraped, especially the flaps and horn, which were salty with perspiration—and the hoe handle and the handles of the plow, salty also, were scored by the hoppers' jaws! Even the cabin roof had been reaped, and the dried sun-flowers alone remained, to rattle in the breeze. The spring trough was choked with bodies, the barrel itself was all fouled, and somehow the greedy creatures had penetrated into the dug-out cellar and attacked the butter, not to speak of drowning in the milk!

"What *will* we do?" murmured Terry's mother,

standing stockstill, and gazing around. "Everything was looking so nice, and now——"

Her voice broke. Tears were in her eyes. Terry sprang for her, and put his arm around her.

"Don't you mind," he comforted. "You've got Harry and me."

"And a cow and a calf," added Harry. "I should say so! If we all of us together can't make a living in a land of milk and honey—not speaking of locusts—we don't deserve it."

"I'm awful sorry for you folks," repeated George, lamely. "Maybe it's as bad at our place. I think I'd better go down and see. Anyway, if we've got anything you can use, you're welcome to it."

So he saddled up, and he and Virgie rode off to investigate.

CHAPTER XVIII

NEWS FROM THE WEST

It could not be otherwise than a sober little party who sat down this afternoon to a late dinner. Terry needs must glance out through the door, occasionally, to make certain that he was not dreaming. Once he had been much pleased, to glance out this way, and see the waving corn, and hay, and oats, and the garden, some of which he had put in by himself, and all of which he had helped to put in. He had planned to support his mother and to surprise his father. Now, what was there to show, for his hard work. Almost everything had disappeared, in a twinkling. The ranch looked like a pretty poor sort of a place—scrubby and uncared for; gone to the dogs—or to the grasshoppers.

Still, Harry seemed to pluck up spirits. He was that kind. Had it not been for Harry, the dinner would not have had any taste. But Harry proceeded to talk gaily.

"We're lucky, anyway, Mother Richards," he asserted. "Supposing Terry and I had the same appetite those hoppers have! How would you ever feed us? But as it is—please pass the potatoes."

"I know," faltered Terry's mother, smiling wanly.

"We ought to be thankful that things are no worse. A fire would have taken the house, and maybe the horses and cattle, too."

"Yes, and all our provisions," added Terry "We can live on milk and honey, and I can go hunting for meat."

"But what will we do this winter?"

"Oh, I've got lots of schemes," informed Harry. "We can gather up the hoppers and press them into dry cakes and eat them—the way the Indians do. Or fry them in butter, the way people do in Arabia and the Holy Land. Or preserve them in sugar, for desert, instead of pie—like the Chinese do. Or in honey! This evidently is a country of locusts and wild honey, like the Bible mentions."

"No!" protested Mother Richards. "I hope we won't have to do all *that*!"

"Well, we can save them and trade them to the chickens this winter for corn," continued Harry. "And eat the corn. But worst hasn't come to worst, yet. It never does. If those hoppers had front legs as long as their hind legs they would have reached down into the potato hills and pulled the potatoes out. Now we have some potatoes left, anyway. After dinner we'll take an inventory, and I believe we'll find that we're a heap better off than if we had nothing."

Mother Richards stayed at the cabin to clean things up, and nurse Shep (who was too sore and tired to move), while her two men trudged out to make their survey of the ranch.

The garden, which was first at hand, indeed presented a sorry sight, eaten off to the very roots. The cabbages were riddled; the tender summer squashes were gnawed; string beans hung in shreds; radish tops and onion tops alike had proved tasty—and where onions and beets and such things had been exposed in the soil, those grasshoppers had bored right into them. However, as Harry had said, the potatoes lay too deep; and although they yet were small, still there'd be enough for many a mess.

The oats were but little superior to the garden. The leaves had been stripped from the stalks, and the tender portions of the stalks eaten off so that the majority of the oat heads were lying on the ground. Harry scanned, and scratched his nose.

"We'll have to reap our oat crop with a garden rake, I guess. Anyway, it isn't a total loss. The hoppers omitted to bring sacks with them, to carry off the heads. And we have the straw, too."

The hay field was, as Harry expressed it, "only freckled." That is, the fresh, greener grasses had been devoured, and the ripe grasses and hard weeds were left, making curious brownish patches.

Harry scratched his nose.

"Half a crop, here," he declared, confidently. "Or, to be honest, a quarter of a crop, and poor stuff at that. But it's worth cutting.

Oh, the corn field! That had fared the worst. The grasshoppers evidently were extremely fond of corn—both sweet corn and field corn.

"Shucks!" exclaimed Harry. "I wish we had."

“Had what?”

“Shucked it before instead of standing here ‘shucking’ it now. But it wasn’t quite ready.”

The stalks were left, standing straight and bare. Bare, too, were the ears, hanging, or fallen to the ground; all with their green husks devoured, the tenderer ears gnawed clean to the cob, and the other ears gouged and disfigured.

“More fodder, served plain, nothing fancy,” sighed Harry. “Well, the cattle aren’t going to suffer this winter, and we sha’n’t, either. Those hoppers missed a few things; they were in too big a hurry. They missed our timber. I always said that timber was our savings bank. We’ll put in our hard licks there, and draw out rails and shingles. Let’s go back and tell Mother Richards about it.”

What an encouraging fellow Harry was!

The chickens and Pete the turkey were out again, busily picking up more grasshoppers, although stuffed to bursting. The horses and the yellow mule were grazing once more, on the short wiry grass that the hoppers had declined. The cow, now as gentle as any cow, had arrived at the corral gate, to get her evening lick of salt, and be milked, and put away for the night. The buffalo calf, long since weaned, was having a friendly bunting duel with Buck the ox, while Spot, the other ox, placidly refereed. Terry’s mother, having cleaned house, was waiting in the doorway, for her two “boys” to return. And altogether the ranch seemed quite cheery. From the corner where he was recovering Shep even wagged his tail.

For the time being the panther carcass had been forgotten; but there it lay, a hideous sight, and must be disposed of. So they did not delay to cut out its claws, but buried it at once. There were matters of more importance, now, than panther claws.

That evening, after chores, they three took stock, and discussed ways and means.

"Let's see," proposed Harry, checking on his fingers. "We can't count on our crops; that's certain. Haven't much more than enough for ourselves. Could spare some hay, but that coarse stuff would scarcely pay for the hauling. Anyway, the government won't want it. I reckon we'll have a few potatoes, but they're small and won't measure up. That cuts down the bushels. The corn doesn't amount to shucks, because there aren't any shucks; but there's enough for the chickens and animals, and maybe for a pinch of meal—two pinches. How much honey have we, mother?"

"Oh, I don't know," confessed Mother Richards. "It's sitting all over the place. What will we do with it?"

"Trade it in," cried Harry. "We'll strain it and take it to market—and the comb is good wax."

"But I haven't any jars; not enough, that is."

"Huh! That's so." And Harry scratched his nose. "Well, any butter ready?"

"Yes, sir!" proudly asserted Mother Richards. "A batch all ready."

"Good. We'll trade the butter for jars; and we'll fill the jars and trade back again for something else. That's a starter. Right away in the morning Terry

can go down to Manhattan and deposit the butter and get the jars. Then he can ride around by Riley and tell them we can't fill our hay contract, but we stand ready to deliver rails and fuel and anything else they'll take from the timber patch. I'll hustle and clear out the corn field before the squirrels get what's left, and we'll sow wheat. Won't need plowing again—we can harrow it in and I shouldn't wonder if we got a pretty good stand. Wheat doesn't mind cold weather. We'll try potatoes again, too. And if I can get hold of any rye we'll sow the oat field to that, after a bit, and get a spring crop, at least."

In fact, Harry was full of plans, and when he and Terry climbed up to bed in the loft, the future looked rosy again.

"Ask the Stantons if they don't want some of this honey," called Terry's mother, after him as he rode away early in the morning, bearing the butter to Manhattan. "Part of it belongs to them, you know. George helped you get it."

Shep was too lame to come along. He was well content to stay quietly at home and lick his wounds. His ear did not seem to be broken, but it never did stand straight again. He always was a lop-eared dog, following his panther fight; but the ear was an honorable token, far superior, in the Brotherhood, to any snake rattles.

Harry had sallied with the mare and the mule and wagon to the corn field, whistling as he went. So Terry rode off alone.

The havoc wrought by the grasshoppers extended

right on down to the Stanton place, so it was evident that the Stantons had suffered, too. The trail and the prairie sod were still thick with the hopping creatures, on which many birds were feeding; and when Terry entered the Stanton yard George met him with rueful face.

"They cleaned us up as bad as they cleaned you," he reported. "We're going to put in our crops over again. And they're laying eggs, pop says, 'way under ground, so we'll have more hoppers next year. That's a great note, isn't it! Two or three years ago there was another big flight, old settlers tell."

"Ma wants to know if you folks wouldn't like some honey," informed Terry. "Part of what we've got is yours, anyway."

"I guess we would," answered George. "I'll ask. Eating's liable to be mighty scarce, in these parts, after that grasshopper storm. Glad it wasn't a prairie fire, though."

"I should say," agreed Terry. "That would have taken the timber and all."

"Where you going?"

"Down to Manhattan and Riley, to trade butter in—and I've got some eggs, too. We count on trading our honey in, after we get jars for it."

"Good work," complimented George. "It'll take more than grasshoppers to wipe out us Kansas settlers—and the hoppers will make the chickens fat! Ours are about busting."

"So are ours," replied Terry. "Well, I've got to go. Lots of business."

"That's right. But if you meet Thunder Horse you'd better not waste your eggs."

"I'm saving two bad ones for him," laughed Terry.

However, he did not meet any Thunder Horse, this time. Thunder Horse probably was fighting shy of a locality that might be dangerous for him after his kidnapping.

He did not meet any Thunder Horse, but he met plenty of the grasshoppers. The swarm had extended south for about seven miles, eating the leaves from the bushes and trees where they had found nothing better. More of them seemed to have remained here than further north. A great many of those in sight on the ground had dug round holes with their hinder ends, and were sitting motionless and half buried, laying their eggs. Ugh! Supposing that there were a million hoppers, and each laid fifty eggs, then next year there'd be fifty million more; and if half of these each laid fifty eggs, the next year there'd be a billion and a quarter; and if half of these each laid fifty eggs—whew!

Down the valley as far as the grasshoppers had extended, all the ranchers appeared to be busy, salvaging their riddled crops and preparing to make a fresh start. They struck Terry as being a remarkably brave people—these immigrant settlers in the new West; and he felt proud to be one of them. For were not he and his mother and Harry doing the same?

On a sudden the grasshopper belt ceased, and he rode through a prospering country again, where on the farms the corn and other grain were waving or already

shocked, and the hay was being cut and stacked, just as should have been the case on his own farm. The few pounds of butter and the several dozen eggs that he was bringing from those 160 broad acres seemed rather picayune; but, anyway, they were something, and a lot better than nothing.

Another horseman was cantering across the valley, making for the trail south. As he and Terry drew together, he looked more and more familiar. Sol Judy! Hurrah! Terry quickened his colt, and waved his hand. Sol waved back and slackened. They met.

"Howdy?"

"Howdy yourself, boy. Where you heading? Did the hoppers drive you out?"

"Not yet," asserted Terry. "And they won't, either. But I'm going down to Manhattan to do some trading."

"Bueno (good)! We'll ride together. I like your spunk. How's the damage up your way?"

"Well, they tried to eat us up," confessed Terry. "We're going right along, though. Have you been up around there? Did you ever see so many grasshoppers before. Do they come every year?"

"Not every year." And Sol laughed. "All depends on the wind and weather, so I hear. Seems like these things start in the spring from the Rocky Mountains yonder. Anyhow, that's where they're seen earliest. The summer winds there and on the plains are mostly from west and nor'west, and if there's been a warm dry spring, and a big hatch, as soon as the young have crawled about and eaten everything and have got wings,

they rise up and sail along with the wind, for pastures greener. That lands some of 'em hereabouts."

"But it doesn't leave any behind, to come again, does it?" queried Terry, hopeful. "And if we can kill all these eggs——"

"Trouble is," said Sol, "on east of here the summer winds are mainly from the sou'-east. So when the pesky things get out into Missouri they're likely to sail back again, high up, on a cross current, and mebbe get where they came from, to start in over again. Of course, I don't know. But I've seen swarms traveling west, in early summer, and I've seen swarms traveling east, in later summer. Curious critters. But they make the turkeys fat—and the country lean. If they get to be a regular pest, some way will be found to kill them out. This is too rich a country to be given over to grasshoppers. How's the colt doing?" And Sol eyed it with critical gaze.

"He's fine. Took me hunting with the Delawares, and I brought back a milk cow and a calf that looks like a buffalo."

"You don't say! A cross between cow and buffalo, eh? Bull calf?"

"Yes, sir. He's tame now."

"Well, they do say these crosses make good animals—stand more than a domestic and can live where a domestic can't. You want to hang on to him and train him for the yoke."

"Guess we will," responded Terry. "We've got plenty of milk, anyway; and butter, and honey from a bee tree. I'm going down to trade some butter, now."

Then I'm going on up to the fort and see if they don't want our timber. The grasshoppers didn't eat that."

"You're the right stuff," approved Sol. "Timber means money, in these parts."

About noon they rode into Manhattan. A crowd had collected before the general store where Terry usually did his trading and buying. They had surrounded several men as a center, and were excitedly discussing and peering. With quick eye, Sol conjectured the cause.

"Gold seekers, by crackity!" he exclaimed, and spurred forward.

Terry followed. From their saddles they could look over the heads of the crowd, and could see the little group in the center. There were two men, shaggy-haired and unshaven and ragged, as if they had just arrived in civilization, from some western wilds.

Sol hastily dismounted.

"What's the trouble?" he asked, of a bystander, while tying his horse.

"Some of those gold-seekers back, who went out to the mountains last spring?"

"What'd they fetch?"

The man laughed.

"Mainly themselves, and lucky to do that. Likewise some tall stories, which I for one don't swallow."

"Didn't they find any gold?"

"Wall, I ain't *seen* any of it, yet."

"Come on," bade Sol, to Terry. "Let's investigate." With Terry, also on foot, close following, he pushed through to the inside of the crowd.

One of the two men had a heavy, russet, dusty full beard extending to his eye-brows. The other man was younger and slighter, but also bearded. Their clothing including boots, was patched roughly, and they looked as if they had had a hard time. Big revolvers were belted at their waists—but this was nothing out of the ordinary.

The russet-bearded elder man was talking.

“Gold? Certain there’s gold. Everybody’s finding it. I reckon there’s near a hundred people searching, and more are coming in. It’s going to be the richest place on the face of the earth. Has the California gold fields beaten out of sight. You take that Cherry Creek, where the Green Russell party are located, and you can wash out the yellow with every shake of the pan. I hear tell the party from Lawrence that followed out after the Green Russell party have gone in further back and are digging the gold with picks. Of course, the higher up you get the more gold there is, and if a fellow’d only get up atop of Pike’s Peak he could roll the chunks down. From our camp we could see it shining, high aloft, when the sun struck it right. Ain’t that so, Tod?”

“You’re right,” concurred the younger man, nodding.

“What! Solid gold?” demanded one in the excitable crowd.

“’Pears like it. I wouldn’t say less.”

“Did you get any of it?”

“Not exactly, to speak of. But we’ve located right at the mountain foot.”

"You say there's gold lower down, though?"

"Plenty of it. They're washing it out everywhere. That whole Pike's Peak country of west Kansas is full of gold."

Here Sol put in.

"It is! What'd you pull out, for, then?" he asked.

"To spread the news and get stocked up with what we need."

"Suppose you brought some of that gold out with you."

The man hesitated.

"Well, we did," he asserted.

"I'd be powerfully obliged for a look at it, stranger," invited Sol.

"All right." The man fished into his trousers pocket, and extracted a small chunk of rock. "What do you think of that, then—Pike's Peak rock?"

A murmur spread through the crowd, and Terry caught his breath. The chunk sparkled and glinted with yellow. Sol had taken it and was examining it—wet it with his tongue, and presently scratched it with his knife point.

"Much of that?" he inquired.

"Tons."

"And all together not worth the powder to blow it up with," declared Sol, carelessly handing the sample back. "You can't fool an old Californy miner. That's nothing but what we call iron pyrites—'fool's gold'. It's too hard for gold; one scratch of a knife point would show you that. And it's too brassy in color.

If that's your color, I wouldn't trade you an acre of Kansas land for your whole mountain."

"Show him what you've got, Tod," directed the man, in unbelieving manner pocketing the chunk. And it was plain to be seen that the crowd were not disposed to believe Sol, either.

From a little pocket sewed inside his boot-top the younger man drew a small article, and passed it over. It was a piece of goose-quill, about two inches long; might once have been part of a pen; or if not a goose-quill, then a quill from some other large bird. But it was yellow. No, it was filled with yellow, showing through the walls. The crowd craned their necks, to see.

Sol turned it about, looked at the ends, stoppered with plugs, and held it up to the light.

"That," he pronounced, "is more like it. Flake gold, but too light to be much account. I've seen better than that by the peck measure full. What else you got to show?" And he handed back the quill.

"What else! Isn't that enough?" retorted the elder man.

"Why," answered Sol, "after all your talk you haven't enough gold to pay for a week's board!" And he indignantly elbowed his way out again. Terry, although he wanted to stay a while longer and hear more, followed.

"There may be gold yonder, in what they call the Pike's Peak country," observed Sol, "but those fellows don't prove it. They've come back broke, but won't admit it."

"I wish I'd asked them about my father," said Terry, with sudden idea. "Or about that Mr. Jones, I mean."

"That's right," exclaimed Sol, halting. "We will. They did mention the Green Russell party, didn't they! Wait a minute."

The crowd were dispersing, as if to go to dinner, and the two gold seekers were left almost alone. With Terry, Sol went hastily back.

"One minute," he hailed. "You dropped a word as to the Green Russell party. Whereabouts are they?"

"They were panning on a bar in the Platte River, when we left," replied, rather sullenly, the elder man. "Washing out about ten dollars a day to a man."

"The party'd split up considerably," added the younger man. "Some of them came down to the Soda Springs, our way."

"Didn't meet up with a man by name of Jones, did you? He went out from Manhattan with Russell, last spring."

"Jones? Yes, sir, there was a man who called himself by name of Jones. A man with brown whiskers and a white patch in his hair—some sort of scar."

"Is he coming back, too?" demanded Terry, eagerly. "Has he struck it rich?"

"Can't say, sonny. He was prospecting 'round, like the rest. Any relation of yours?"

"I don't know," faltered Terry.

"Well, however that may be, he's a queer one. Seems as though what had hurt him on the head had hurt his mind. Never did hear him say where he was

from, in the States; but his head used to bother him every now and again, and he'd sort of forget what he was up to, till the spell was over. So he's liable to leave, or he's liable to stay. We're the first out, and more will follow."

"He was well and hearty, except for his head, was he, when you last saw him?" queried Sol.

"Yes, sir. And I don't say that he isn't smart, either. You or anybody else can rest easy on those scores."

"That news," quoth Sol, to Terry, as they walked away, "beats the gold, eh? Little by little we'll catch up with him."

CHAPTER XIX

TACKLING THE TIMBER

WHEN after dinner and his "shopping" at the general store Terry rode out for Fort Riley, he rode with a lighter heart. That Mr. Jones was his father he no longer had the slightest doubt. And Sol had agreed. Here was a man who had been hurt on the head, and had forgotten himself and had wandered off, and now sometimes acted queer, as if trying to remember. These two other men had seen him; except for his head trouble he was "well and hearty," they had assured. So he had arrived safely at the mountains, and was looking for the gold.

That in itself was comforting news. Maybe he would return this very summer. The gold seekers were beginning to return. Maybe he would come home in his own mind, with a sack of gold. At any rate, Sol had engaged to keep watch of the travel from the west, through Manhattan. Whether he came in his right mind or not, with gold or without, he would be given a big welcome and would find his hat waiting for him, at the ranch.

Perhaps, then, they all would go out to the gold fields; especially if his father had discovered a mine!

Those two men had said that there was gold for everybody. Of course, they hadn't brought back much—only a quill full—and Sol was skeptical; but the quill full was some proof, and Terry was certain that his father would find gold if anybody could.

First, the ranch must be put in shape, to surprise him on his return. They could not sit around, waiting, and depending on gold. No, sir; they must go right ahead and work hard.

At the fort Captain Steuart seemed truly sorry when he heard about the grasshoppers and the damage they had wrought. He readily promised to take all the cord wood that could be hauled, and some long rails for corrals and fencing. That was good. Lieutenant Arnold was not at the post; he was out on a scout; but Sergeant Murphy was here, and he and Mrs. Murphy invited Terry to supper and stowed him for the night. Before noon of the next morning he was home again, to report upon all that had happened on his trip.

His mother and Harry voted that a successful trip had it been. They were immensely excited to hear the latest news of the mysterious "Mr. Jones" (who, they also agreed, could be none other but Father Richards), and to know that at last account he was alive and well, and maybe finding gold. However, Terry's mother was less interested in the gold, even the quill of gold, than she was in the rest of the report. And Harry paid less attention to the gold than he did to the prospect that they would sell their wood and rails.

"We must get busy right away!" declared Mother

Richards—as if they had not always been busy. “When your father comes I want him to find us prospering again. It will mean so much to him, to know that we haven’t suffered any because of his absence—except, of course, we’ve missed him.”

“First we’ll finish putting in fresh crops. Then we’ll tackle that timber, Terry,” asserted Harry. “It’ll be a tough job, too, but who cares? Swinging an ax is good for the back.”

“I know I can depend on my two men,” encouraged Mother Richards, gratefully. “And this very afternoon I’ll fill those jars with honey, so we can send it to town at the first opportunity.”

Harry already had gathered most of the corn from the corn field, and had heaped it in a pile near the house, where the cattle could be kept away from it. Some of it was pretty good, and much of it was pretty poor; but there’d be enough for feed, and they could burn the poor stuff in the stove. He had thrown the wagon cover over it, for the present; but a crib would have to be built, to keep it off the ground, as soon as they had rails enough.

After dinner he and Terry dragged the corn field, with the mare and the yellow mule, and sowed wheat broadcast and harrowed it in with the oxen. And a busy afternoon for all hands this was.

The next day they cleaned up the garden, rescuing what portion of it they could. When they had dug up the potatoes, and stored them in the outside cellar until it would hold no more, they had about a wagon load left over, to sell. This was better than might have been

expected. They were small potatoes, but sound and well flavored, although a little green.

Harry took the mare and the mule and the wagon, and drove off with the potatoes and the honey, to town, on a two days' trip. He left Terry to clear the oat field, in case they'd want to replant it. And besides, the oat heads and stalks would be useful as feed. So for two days Terry worked with scythe and rake—changing from one to the other, as a rest, you know. One of those new-fangled mowers drawn by horses would have done the job in a jiffy, and he wondered if they could not borrow some kind of a machine, for the hay. This scythe-swinging was awfully hard work.

But Harry returned enthusiastic, with supplies which included rye enough to sow part of the oat field, and with some seed potatoes. They put in the rye and the potatoes, and attacked the hay. Had to cut it and rake it and stack it by hand. Rumor said that down the valley some of the settlers possessed newly invented mowers, and even horse rakes; but up here in the later settled country there was none to be had, and the hay would not wait.

However, as a result of the steady grinding work, by September the ranch made quite a showing. No matter that the crops were short, and of poor quality, there they were, gathered. From the cabin door anybody could look and see the oat stack, and the hay stacks, and the heap of corn, and the potato plants above ground, and the new rye and wheat greening each a large patch—and Terry, for one, felt proud. He and Harry were lean and hard, their hands were brown on

the backs and calloused on the palms, but they had achieved well and were ready for the next task.

Should father come at any time now, he would find the crops gathered and showing up; the two oxen, the mare, the colt grown into a useful horse, a cow and a half-buffalo calf, a yellow mule, many more chickens, a turkey; and *three* people (or four, rather, counting Shep, who was lively again) ready to welcome him.

The next real task was in the timber. They did not get at this until the middle of September, for there had been another trip or so to town, with butter and eggs and more honey; the very necessary building of the corn crib out of some lumber from an abandoned claim (whose tenants had been frightened away by the grasshoppers), to protect the corn against the Fall rains; and the regular chores, and constant odd jobs that could not be delayed.

The Stantons were fully as busy, although evenings, once in a while, and on Sundays, the two families managed to see one another. But the after-supper school was given up, for the present; Terry and George both were too dog tired, as a rule, to put much energy on spelling, arithmetic and geography.

Harry was very anxious to tackle the timber, so as to build rail fences around the stacks and the grain fields before the cattle (not omitting deer and antelope) began to invade, tempted away from the withering grasses. And he wanted shingles, also, for the cabin and perhaps the dugout cellar.

"Never split rails, did you?" he asked, of Terry—with a little smile.

"Never did," admitted Terry.

"Then you'll have a great chance to learn," laughed Harry. "So will George. He's coming over to-morrow with an ax and all the muscle he can bring, and we're got an engagement in the timber."

The engagement which opened on the morrow proved to be a long one. Cutting the timber and splitting the rails was slow, slow work, particularly at first while Terry and George were getting the hang of it. The Stantons contributed George and the ax, for a share in the "crop"; and anyway, the timber on the Richards' place was much better than that on their own.

Harry felled the trees, selecting the straightest and tallest of the oaks and black walnuts. For a chap who was lame and did not look to be especially strong, he had a great knack at chopping. He stood back, in the clear, so that he could just reach the middle of the trunk with his ax blade; and having thus measured, with a free-arm swing of the ax over his head he brought it down, at an angle—thwack! It landed exactly where the edge had rested a moment before, and was buried slant-wise nearly to the butt, shoulder high in the tree. Two or three times more he sunk the ax head in the same place. Then with more of a side swing he landed the blade almost straight in, two or three feet below the first cut. A couple more strokes there, while the splinters flew, and out popped a large, wedge-shaped chip, leaving a gouge as clean as a whistle. The chips came out gradually smaller as the gouge deepened; and having cut nearly half through on this side, Harry

stepped around and began to cut out chips on the opposite side. Before he had got half way through, here, the fibers broke and crackled, the tree swayed, leaned, and crashed down, to the side where he had started in.

"You're a boss chopper," praised George. For the top of the stump was as smooth as if chiseled, except where a spike of broken wood stood in the middle.

"Well, I didn't chew it up much, that's a fact," acknowledged Harry, surveying the stump with some satisfaction. "I hate a ragged stump. It means wasted strokes and lost motion. I like to make every stroke count—each following where the other quit. That's one secret of falling a tree. And another secret is making your chips big to begin with, for if you don't start with a good-sized cut, before you get in very far you'll not have room enough and will jam your ax. Of course, that depends on how thick the trunk is. The thicker the trunk, the bigger the cut to begin with. A three-foot chip for a four-foot trunk is a safe plan."

"Jiminy! Wish I could fall a tree in a hurry, like that," quoth George, admiringly. "Doesn't look hard, either. You aren't even puffing."

"Expect I will be puffing, though, before we're through," laughed Harry. "Two men to a tree, one chopping right handed and one left handed, is the proper caper. Two good men ought to fall a five-foot tree in half an hour."

"You hold your ax clear at the end of the handle, don't you!" proffered Terry. "And you hit in the same places whenever you want to."

“Try to, anyway. Start the argument and drive it home. Yes, a fellow gets a better swing and more force with less effort if he holds the ax by the end of the handle. That’s what the knob on the end is for—to give him a grip so the handle won’t slip. You don’t need to hold so very tight—got to have an easy grip, is all—and if the ax is rightly balanced you can bring it down with your shoulders and back so it will sink out of sight. You slant it in, more or less, at every stroke, so it won’t stick. But you want to watch out that it doesn’t glance and cut a leg off. That’s about all I was taught; to save your muscle as much as you can and make the ax do the work. Some axes are better balanced than others. This is a pretty good one.”

“Did you mean to have this tree land there on that spot, like you did the bee tree?” queried George. “I guess you did. We saw you sort of scouting and planning.”

“A scientific ax-man can lay a tree so it will drive a peg with its trunk,” asserted Harry. He scratched his nose, reflectively. “But an ordinary chopper’s got to be content with not driving himself instead of the peg, or hanging his tree up in another tree. You usually start the first cut in the tree on the side where you expect it to fall. That makes it lean more or less, and you’ll be finishing on the side where it won’t fall. If it leans in that direction in the beginning, that’s where it will fall anyway, unless it bounces sideways, from another tree. Some ax-men figure on the bounce and will land a tree just about wherever you tell them to. And by cutting a quarter way ’round, extending

the first cut, they'll swing it, and land it. I've seen men who can handle a big tree like a fishing pole. But what I'm always afraid of is a kick-up, when the cut doesn't break true, and a branch strikes the ground unexpectedly and bounces the butt. Then a fellow has to take his chances to get out of the way in a hurry. But you're here to split rails, aren't you? I'll log this tree for you and you can start in."

He quickly lopped off some of the branches so that the trunk settled securely; and pacing three paces and a half pace from the butt stood upon the trunk there and chopped between his feet. Again the chips flew. He plied the ax until with a final stroke he had severed the trunk into a ten foot length.

Now the ten foot log was to be split into rails. Harry sank his ax blade into the end, on top, and into the cleft drove an iron wedge, pounding it home with the maul or sledge which had been brought from the house. As the log began to crack, he followed the crack with his ax, cutting the tough cross splinters. Soon the crack was wide enough so that he could move the wedge farther along. Then he handed the job over to the boys.

Terry took the wedge and maul, George handled the ax; and before Harry had felled another tree the log had been split open and the halves were being subdivided into rails, by the same process.

They got six rails out of this log, which was good for the first attempt. They were tremendously heavy rails, four rather too thick, with two rather too thin; and on the whole represented small results from an hour and

a half's work. Terry figured that at this rate Christmas would come before there were rails enough for one fence.

Harry paused to explain that two persons clever with axes would do quicker work by dispensing with the wedge and maul, and splitting the rails with the axes alone—chopping a straight line, down the grain, each ax alternately freeing the other by opening the crack just ahead of it. But this took a keen eye and much care, lest the ax glance.

Thus they toiled all day: Harry felling and logging the trees, the boys splitting the logs into rails. What with incessantly pounding and chopping, and dragging the rails aside out of the way, and raising huge blisters and getting splinters in their hands (and a fellow had to be mighty cautious not to let the crack close on his fingers while extracting the wedge or slipping and falling), by evening and chore time they all were dead tired. However, they had about a wagon load of the heavy green rails, waiting to be hauled. And such a quantity, already, of fire wood: the chips, scattered about, and the tops of the felled trees, and the waste from the logs! Would the work, begun, ever be done!

But Harry was a wonder. The size of the task seemed not to appal him in the least. Morning after morning he bounced out of bed before full sun rise, threw his pillow at Terry and teased him until he followed; they jumped into the chores; and directly after breakfast trudged away for the timber, Shep accompanying. When George could not come over, they

managed to do without him. And day after day the piles of rails increased in number.

They did not wait to season the rails, for fencing; but with the ox team hauled them from the timber and distributed them one by one. They crossed short rails, scissors shape, or like an 'X', setting them on end over a large chunk; thrust a rail through, half its length, between the chunk and the lower angle, and laid the end of another rail in the upper angle. Thus the 'X' was braced and could not close. The other ends of the rails rested on the ground, so that the rails slanted upward, in a series, with 'X's' every five feet, to support the middle of one rail and the end of another. This was a buck fence, rapidly thrown up.

George, and now and then his father, helped; and when Mr. Stanton hauled rails for himself, Harry and Terry took a day off from the timber and helped him.

The rails were not the only product of the timber. The felled trunks were logged into six-foot lengths, and split into cord-wood, for the fort. And there were the shingles, or shakes.

To make shingles it was necessary to cut the straightest-grained logs into chunks about fourteen inches long, and peel the bark off. Then the chunk was quartered, with the grain, through the middle; and from the widest faces of the quarters thin slabs were split.

Harry traded some rails for clapboarding (although he could have made rough clapboards, like rails were split), and he and Terry shingled the cabin and the cellar; tacked strips from end to end, across the shingle

butts, to hold them in place; tacked the strips with wooden spikes, or treenails, to save the cost of iron nails. And while the job was not very fancy, when finished, the roof proved perfectly weather proof.

The weather held constantly fine. A goodly supply of fire wood was piled against the cabin, and plenty more remained in the timber. Rails and cordwood were easily sold or traded, down the valley, and in town and at the post, whenever Harry or Terry was ready to haul a load out, with the mare and mule or with ox team. The nights grew crisp, but aided by the warm sunny days and the occasional, welcomed rains the potatoes and the grain thrived apace.

CHAPTER XX

THE GIFT OF THE BLIZZARD

WHAT a wonderfully fine Fall this proved to be! The timber yielded not only an abundance of rails and shingles and fuel, but also hickory nuts and walnuts, wild plums and grapes, and now and then a fat turkey. After a week of frequent rain, the weather settled into a long Indian Summer, of clear nights and still, sunny days during which the grain ripened amazingly. All through the valley the ranchers were harvesting in haste, to make sure of these their second crops before the first snow arrived to crush the slender stalks.

A thresher traveled from place to place; and by the time that it appeared at the Richards' ranch Harry and Terry had mowed their wheat and rye and had shocked it, in readiness. The stand was not so heavy as it might have been, and many of the heads had not filled out; but the yield more than repaid the efforts that had been put upon achieving it.

After the threshing, by horse-power, Harry hauled the grain to the mill at Manhattan and returned with flour.

So the first week of December found the ranch well provisioned against the winter. The only thing lacking was Terry's father. He had not come, and there

was no further word of him. A number of other gold seekers had traveled eastward through Manhattan—and a number had gone out to the mountains, enthused by the reports. But of any “Mr. Jones” not a particle more news had been gathered.

On this Terry reflected as he left with the ox team and wagon, to take a last load of cord-wood to Fort Riley. The weather was likely to break, any day, and the chances were that the load was the last to be delivered for some months. One big snow would tie the ranch up, as to heavy hauling. That was why he used the ox team; they were sturdier pullers, in a pinch, and should a storm come and make the road heavy, they would get him through. But they were slow, and with ox team the round trip to Manhattan or Fort Riley occupied three days.

It was a soft, sweet morning. Basking in the early sunshine the ranch looked at its best. The yellow stubble of the two grain fields surrounded by the fences; the short, self-cured grass which furnished famous grazing; the cow and her half-buffalo calf, the colt, the mare and the yellow mule industriously feeding there; the chickens and Pete the tamed turkey picking and chattering in the recent rye patch; the well stocked granary and corn crib and the hay stacks; the filled-to-bursting outdoor cellar; overlooking all, the comfortable shingled cabin, with his mother singing at her work, and the blows of Harry’s ax echoing from the timber where he was trimming some clapboards—this thrilled Terry with pride. It was his ranch or at least was part his, for he had helped to make it. If only

his father would appear and see, and know, then happiness would be complete. The ranch lacked just that: father. They three had so frequently thought of him, and really had worked hard to get things ready for him. His hat was a poor substitute, and it still hung on the peg, waiting.

Buck and Spot, the oxen, trudged steadily; Shep, alongside, had no difficulty keeping up. That night Terry stayed at the hospitable Andrews ranch, down the valley and over half way on his journey; and by the next noon trundled into Fort Riley, where Captain Steuart and Lieutenant Arnold and old Sergeant Murphy were very glad to see him.

"An' when be ye startin' home, may I ask?" inquired the sergeant.

"This afternoon, maybe," answered Terry. "I thought I'd stop in Manhattan, and get some stuff for the ranch."

"I'd advise ye to go home straight, my boy," spoke the sergeant, with a wag of his carrotty head. "An' as quick as you can travel. I'm thinkin' there's a storm comin'. I feel it in my bones."

"I don't see any sign of it, though," argued Terry; for the day was warm and placid—a perfect Indian Summer day.

"No?" And the sergeant again wagged his head dubiously. "But I can tell. If you'd lived on the plains as long as I have, you could tell, too. The birds tell me, an' the beasts tell me, an' my bones tell me, an' the Injuns say the same. There's the feel in the air. I don't look for it this night, or maybe to-morrow;

but there's a norther brewin', and when it comes it'll come with its tail up. 'Twould be a bad thing for ye to be caught on the trail, an' I'd order ye to stay, but belike your mother'd be worried frantic, an' if you start at wance like as not you'll beat it. So if I were you I'd lave Manhattan for another time an' strike for home by the shortest route. Sure, travelin' light, an' takin' the cut-off to the valley, you might go a good ways yet before dark, an' by the morrow evenin' or before ye'd be safe where ye belong and an' save your mother all the worry."

Yes, it seemed to be the general opinion around the post that a bad storm was at hand. After their noon feed and rest Buck and Spot were in good shape; so Terry accepted the advice given him and started for home, not by the main road down-river to Manhattan, but by a cut-off which from the high table-land whereon was located Fort Riley crossed over northeastward into the Valley of the Blue. It was used as a timber-hauling road.

Buck and Spot, headed for home, plodded briskly; and Terry, seated in the empty wagon, driving with his voice and the long-lashed whip, urged them on while the wagon clattered and jolted under him.

The sun set clear and golden when in the Valley of the Blue again he halted at another of those settler cabins whose doors were always open to the wayfarer. Settler Emory and his wife also were fearful that the weather was about to break. They had lived in the valley for three years, and claimed that they knew the weather. After such a Fall the change would come

on a sudden—and it was coming soon. But they thought that Terry would get home.

Terry was not a whit alarmed. The main road up the valley was an old friend of his; in his mind's eye he could sketch every inch of it. Now on the home stretch he had no thought of delaying to wait upon the weather. If he did wait, and a storm did set in, his mother, and Harry, too, would imagine all sorts of harrowing things. His mother (as the sergeant had said) likely would "worry herself frantic", and Harry probably would ride out into the storm, searching for him.

When he rumbled out, with team and wagon, in the early morning, another beautiful day was promised by sun and sky. But by the time that he had traveled five miles, even he could sense the change impending. The air was soft and still, and yet over the blue sky was creeping a haze, so that the sun seemed farther away. While the haze closed in, the landscape appeared to be watching it, and through the stillness the voices from the ranches and the cawing of the crows sounded unusually loud.

Terry cracked his lash over his oxen's backs, to hasten the pace, and proceeded blithely.

"Buck! Spot! G'lang!" he encouraged. But nobody can well hurry oxen. Buck and Spot were trudging as fast as was comfortable. Shep, his tongue out, ambled behind the wagon.

The haze overhead had thickened; all the brightness of the day was paled, and the sun shone dimly from amidst a ring. The tops of the hills stood out darkened

and very sharp against the drab horizon. The air had chilled perceptibly. There was now no doubt that the storm would arrive soon. But the familiar road stretched onward; it led past ranches from which people waved or shouted greetings to Terry—they all knew Terry Richards, of the Richards place up the valley—and bore travelers other than himself.

“Change in the weather. Going to snow.”

“Reckon so,” agreed Terry, cheerfully. “Buck! Spot! G’lang!”

By noon he was more than half way. He decided not to stop for dinner, and paused only to water the oxen at a trough. The day had thickened amazingly; the haze had closed down, the sun was gone, the air was emphatically chill and raw, and a vague moaning drifted from the distant hills in the west. That was a breeze, heard before felt, humming a storm song. The birds were flitting restlessly; and now and then the sunflower stalks and the other weeds rustled uneasily, as if afraid.

Whew, how cold it was growing, as well as dark! Terry already had put on his coat; he buttoned it up around his neck, and swung his lash vigorously, not only to urge on Buck and Spot but also to keep himself warmer. He had left the major portion of the settled valley behind him; from here onward the ranches thinned out rapidly, and the road was less and less traveled until beyond the Stanton ranch it was merely a road which he and Harry had made, on their trips out and in.

Everything was so dull and dark that there was no

way of telling the time. The birds had ceased twittering on the prairie; even the weeds were silent; the intervals between ranches were long. And all alone he rumbled on, anxiously eying the sky.

He began to see his breath, and the puffing breath of the oxen. Jiminy! Was it getting as cold as that? He jumped off, to trot awhile at the fore wheel and limber up. The breeze from the west suddenly soughed louder and flared his hat brim with a raw, warning gust; and when he glanced westward, alarmed, all the hills had vanished in a white mist. The breeze had veered into the north of west; the storm had crossed the dividing ridge and was in the Valley of the Blue, and he had ten miles to go.

However, that was nothing, on a plain road through this familiar country. He had passed the ranches except the Stanton ranch, but this lay only about eight miles before, and beyond that by a short space was home. Once at the Stanton ranch he would be safe; could borrow a horse and saddle, if necessary.

“Buck! Spot! G’lang!”

In five minutes it was snowing. At first the flakes were small, driven fiercely by a strong wind and stinging his cheek, as bent forward he trudged beside the wagon, calling to his oxen. Speedily the flakes increased in size and number; they filled the air, with their long lines of flight weaving a dense net-work that instantaneously blotted out the landscape, and enclosed him in a mesh. They plastered his face and coat, and turned the oxen and the road white. It was a big storm.

Shep, his shaggy fur made heavy, took refuge under the wagon, where he occasionally shook himself as he ambled. The snow piled up rapidly. Soon Terry could not see the road, except where the ruts had crushed the sod and weeds; and the ruts themselves were being leveled by the white flood.

Buck and Spot, heads low, snorted as they strained in the yoke. This, and the creaking yoke and wagon, were the only sounds to be heard. Forming a little world of his own, through that other, strange world which he did not recognize pushed Terry. He could not make out the road at all, now, and every landmark had disappeared, flattened by the snow, but he was certain that he was heading right.

By its magic touch, how quickly the snow had changed things! He had no idea where he was—couldn't see beyond the oxen, anyway. Walking was getting difficult; he stumbled, trudging ankle deep, and was wringing wet with perspiration. So he climbed aboard, and drew over him the buffalo robe that he had used as a pad to sit on. This was more comfortable. The air was growing icy, and he could wrap up his red, wet hands.

The oxen toiled, and blew to clear their nostrils. The wagon, its rumble dulled by the snow, rolled on. Terry sat hunched, and wondered where he was, with his outfit. It seemed to him he must be near the Stanton place, but he had seen no fences or house. Would he never, never get anywhere? In fact, was he on the road at all? The wagon lunged suspiciously, and under the wheels weeds crackled.

"Buck! Spot! G'lang!" he appealed, desperately. "What's the matter with you! Hep!"

He was not cold, but the snow in his face made him drowsy. He may have dozed off; at any rate, he was aroused to action by the wagon stopping. He opened his eyes and peered. An object loomed whitely, just ahead. The oxen were staring and snorting.

It was a horse—a saddled horse, standing huddled, tail to the storm; and another object, of mingled white and black, on the ground beside it. A man! Thoroughly awakened, Terry threw off his buffalo robe and plumped out.

The man was sitting with his head almost between his knees, and the bridle lines fast gripped in one stiff hand. The snow had lodged in a white layer upon his back and hat, so he probably had been here some time. He wore a black slouch hat and an old overcoat, but his hands were bare. His overcoat collar was turned up.

"Hello!" cried Terry. "Here! You'd better get up. You can't sit there."

The figure stirred a trifle, and mumbled thickly. Terry stooped and grasped his shoulder.

"Get up. Can't you get up?" And—"You *must* get up! You'll freeze."

Shep trotted out from under the wagon, curious to see what was happening. He gingerly sniffed of the figure—lifted his tail and began to bark. That bark seemed to penetrate farther than had Terry's voice, for the figure stirred again, and did make an attempt to rise. But he sank back.



THE MAN WAS SITTING WITH HIS HEAD ALMOST BETWEEN HIS KNEES, AND THE BRIDLE LINES FAST GRIPPED
IN ONE STIFF HAND.

"I'll help you. I'll put you in the wagon," shouted Terry. "Try to walk."

He thrust his hands under the figure's arms and lifted stoutly. The figure strove, too; apparently knew that something was being done for him. Terry lifted him part way—but his legs gave out from under him, and he and Terry came down together. His hat fell off. Shep was barking more wildly than ever—and straightening for another effort Terry saw that the man's hair was marked with a long white blotch! Not snow—not a bit of it. It was white hair—over a scar! Yes, sir. Now the bearded face also was revealed; and peering, Terry uttered a gasp of astonishment. But Shep had known, first.

"Father! Don't you know me?" appealed Terry. "It's Terry! I'm Terry! Hurrah! Please help. I've got the wagon right here. You get in and I'll take you home—take you to the ranch. It's only a little way."

He tugged, again, lifting. His father tried, as if he had understood. The lines had fallen from his grasp; his feet were numb, evidently—did not work, and he was stiff all through. But Terry managed to hold him upright, and half carried him, half dragged him, to the wagon; supported him and placed one of his feet on the wheel hub, and his hands on the edge of the wagon bed. Then braced behind him and shoved—gradually raised him forward (while he fumbled and wavered) until he pitched in and fell in a heap.

Terry scrambled in after him; straightened him out, and snatching the buffalo robe rolled him in it. Father!

Think of that! Father! He must have been on his way home. Where had he come from? But no matter. Here he was, and he had been rescued just in time. What good fortune! Supposing the oxen had not stopped. Why, they might have passed right by. Or supposing he, Terry, had waited, at Fort Riley, or down the valley, on account of the storm! It seemed as though he had been led right to this spot, at this critical moment.

But Terry did not delay to speculate with himself. Hustle, was the word. He ran to the saddled horse, seized the hanging lines and led it (stiff was the horse, too) and fastened it to the tail of the wagon.

"Shep! Good old Shep! We found dad!" he encouraged. Shep, shaking his wet hide, barked joyously.

Terry climbed to the seat and swung his lash.

"Buck! Spot! Hep! G'lang, now. Home! Home!"

The oxen started, the wagon lurched to their tugs, and through the driving snow forged ahead, across the whitely veiled expanse.

This was not the road, though; it certainly was not the road. It was not any road. The tires crushed too many weeds, and sometimes dead sunflower stalks brushed the seat. Terry, urging the team, no longer was cold or sleepy; he was all alert and eager, but he began to be alarmed. Where was he, and where were the oxen going with him, and with his father? The storm was biting his face, as if the wind, or he, had shifted direction. The road was lost—he was lost, and

evidently was out somewhere on the broad, trackless prairie.

The wagon lurched, and Terry lurched with it. White was he, white was the buffalo robe on the wagon bed behind him, and white were the plodding oxen before, wading to their knees in that other whiteness. Alternately he shouted at them and looked for landmarks. Ever the wagon moved, but it never arrived. Suddenly the oxen stopped, as if to rest, panting. They would not advance, in spite of his urging with voice and lash. Out he jumped, alighting on stinging feet, and plowed around to their heads. No wonder that they would not go on; they had come to a fence, squarely across their path.

A fence! Whose fence? It was a "buck" rail fence, like the fences on the ranch, but also like the fences on the Stanton ranch and on many another ranch in the valley; and what kind of a field it enclosed he could not tell, because of the snow. One thing was sure: he had lost the road.

The fence dimly stretched without end, on either hand. Which way should he turn, to get to a house or into the open? Maybe he'd better set off on foot, and leave the team. No, that wouldn't do. He didn't dare to. The team might move, and he'd not be able to find them again, and his father. That would be horrible.

Shep came out, snuffing about. He'd try Shep. Dogs ought to know, if oxen didn't.

"Here, Shep. Home, old boy! Home, Shep! Go home!" essayed Terry.

But Shep only gamboled, and barked impatiently;

put his fore paws up to the wagon bed and barked and wanted to climb in. The more Terry ordered, the more Shep barked, while the snow sifted down and the wind moaned drearily, and the oxen stood drooping, near spent.

Terry was getting chilled through.

"Gee, Buck! Hep with you! Gee! Gee, now!"

At a venture he turned them to the right, along the fence. Shep barked—but whether he barked just because they were moving again, or because they were going right, or wrong, Terry had no idea. Listen, though! Wasn't that a whoop—a halloo, smothered by the flakes?

Shep heard. His ears were pricked, and he halted with cold foot uplifted.

"Whoop-ee!" shrilled Terry, with all lungs.

An answer drifted on the wind. His heart glowed with hope renewed. He urged on Buck and Spot, and shouted repeatedly.

"Whoo-oo-pee!"

"Whoo-oo-pee!" drifted the replies.

"Hello! Where are you?" The voice was nearer—seemed to issue from behind him.

"Here!" called Terry. "Whoa-oa!"

"All right. Stand still. We're coming. Keep calling."

Terry waited, and called. In a minute more he saw them—two horsemen, riding slowly down upon him, from toward the rear. One was Harry, wasn't it? Yes! And the other was Sol Judy. They were snow-

covered, but by their strained anxious faces they were well frightened.

"That you, Terry? Thank God!" exclaimed Harry, from the back of the mare.

"Where you going, boy?" demanded Sol, huge in a great buffalo coat. "Where do you think you're heading?"

"I don't know," faltered Terry. "I want to get home, but I lost the road, and then this fence stopped me."

"Lucky it did," said Sol. "But turn around, turn around. You're heading for the Missouri River. You're 'way, 'way off the trail."

"Whose fence is it?" pleaded Terry. "Is it ours? Have I passed the Stantons'?"

"Yes. But this is their new patch that they fenced in, on their east line. You're clear over to the east, boy," explained Harry. "We've been riding for two hours, and had about given you up when we struck your wagon-wheel tracks away back. We followed them till they were swallowed up by the snow, and if it hadn't been for Shep's barking—but whose horse you got?"

"It's father's—it's my father's," exclaimed Terry, roused to energy. "And he's in the wagon, under that buffalo robe. I found him—found him on the way. Let's hurry. Please hurry. You show me where to go."

"What!" rapped Sol. "Alive, is he?"

"Yes; but I've covered him up. He wouldn't be alive, though, if I hadn't found him. Found him on

the prairie, down in the snow. Where do we go, now? Back?"

And with frantic "Gee!" and "Hep!" and "Gee!" again, Terry turned his team.

"You just follow us," bade Harry. "Can you hold out? Only a mile or two."

"I'm all right, but I want to get there quick," announced Terry.

Up to the seat he gladly climbed. Harry and Sol led forth, the oxen followed almost of their own accord, and the wagon lumbered after. The oxen now required little urging; they seemed to know that they were being taken home. From his seat Terry had not the least idea of direction. Jounced and bounced and swayed, as the wagon struck the prairie humps and hollows, he clung fast, and peered expectantly. Quite to his own surprise, on a sudden out-buildings loomed before him, and here he was, in the ranch yard, with the cabin standing waiting and its door flung wide by his mother, framed and gazing.

"Oh, Terry! Are you here? Did they find you?"

"Yes," cried Terry, tumbling off in haste. "And I brought father! He's in the wagon."

Harry and Sol also were off in a twinkling. Even while his mother was exclaiming they had lifted the snowy hummock from the wagon bed, and were carrying buffalo robe and all into the cabin. Terry bolted after. So did Shep.

CHAPTER XXI

FATHER RICHARDS WAKES UP

How warm and cosy it was in here, out of the storm, with the fire-place blazing high, ruddily lighting the early dusk. Mrs. Richards already had opened the bed curtains; and marching straight Harry and Sol deposited their burden. Off came the snowy buffalo robe.

"It is he! It is, Terry!" ejaculated Terry's mother.

For there had been no mistake. Father Richards this was, looking perfectly natural, and as if asleep. His eyes were closed, but he was breathing regularly—he was a little thin, maybe—he seemed all right, though—hadn't been frozen.

The two men stripped off his outer clothes, tucked him under the blankets, and reaching rubbed his hands and feet. Mrs. Richards bustled to heat some milk on the stove. Terry dumbly watched. He was cold and wet and hungry, too, but he did not mind that. Only—there did not appear to be anything that he could do.

"Guess I'd better put up the oxen," he said, gruffly, a lump in his throat.

"Not much!" And Harry sprang up alertly. "I rather guess you won't. You stay where you are. You've done your stint. When your father wakes he'll want to see you."

Out darted Harry, into the storm, to care for the oxen. With—"I think your husband's going to be all right, ma'am. He's warm as toast and beginning to sweat," Sol followed. Terry's mother turned on Terry and seized him in a rapturous hug.

"Oh, Terry! To think, you brought him! And you came home in all this storm! Where did you find him? But you can tell us later. First you must change your clothes, and drink some hot milk. Part of the milk is for you. You can change your clothes down here, dear, where it's warm. I'll get your things."

"Can't I wait?" queried Terry. "I'm dry, and he's liable to wake."

"You must drink your milk, anyway, and draw close to the fire," bade Mother Richards. "Oh, I wonder if he'll know us."

Terry luxuriously sprawled on a stool before the splendid fire, and sipped, and steamed, and kept watch on his father. His mother hovered anxiously, waiting too. Now and then she laid a hand gently on Father Richards' forehead—and suddenly he opened his eyes.

For an instant she bent over him, and Terry held his breath, excited.

"Ralph!" she said, softly. "Don't you know me? I'm Mary; and here's Terry. You're home—home on the ranch."

Father Richards stared wonderingly, but uttered no sound. To the milk flew Mother Richards, bore back a cupful, put her arm around his neck and raised him.

"Drink," she said. "Please do. It's hot—good."

He drank, at first tasting, then swallowing eagerly. He drained to the last drop. Mother Richards let him sink on the pillow, and with a sigh he went off to sleep once more.

Terry's mother turned with a wistful smile, and eyes dewy.

"Do you think he knew us, Terry?"

"He didn't say, but he might have," faltered Terry, disappointed. "Maybe he will next time."

"Yes, maybe he will next time. We must let him sleep. Anyway, he drank the milk."

"We'll keep him, just the same, whether he knows us or not, won't we?" invited Terry.

"Of course we will! He'll know us some time."

Harry and Sol tiptoed in, having done the chores. But they need not have tiptoed, for Father Richards' slumber was a sound one. He slept without a movement except his breathing, all through supper, and through the evening.

The storm continued, and Sol Judy stayed for the night. He had been here since noon. Lucky enough, too, that he had stopped; for when he and Harry had ridden out to look up Terry, he it was who with his plainsman's eyes had discovered the fast fading wagon tracks.

Before bedtime they looked through Father Richards' clothing, to see if they could find some information about him. And they certainly did. Inside his coat pocket was a folded piece of paper, written on with lead pencil. It said:

To Whom This May Concern: My name is not Jones, but Ralph Richards. I have a wife and boy on a farm in the Big Blue Valley of Kansas. Something hit me on the head and made me lose my memory and I went out to the Pike's Peak country. Now I am going home; but if anything should happen to me, this will prove my identity, and will declare that I have located some rich gold ground to which said wife and boy are entitled, on the Platte River about a day's journey into the mountains from the mouth of Cherry Creek. Mr. [but nobody could make out the name, because the paper was so soggy and torn] knows about it.

Ralph Richards.

And in another pocket there was a little sack of gold flakes!

"About two hundred dollars, I reckon," pronounced Sol.

"And he's got a mine, he says!" exclaimed Terry. "When he knows us maybe he'll take us to it, ma! We'll pack up and all go together."

"Not this weather, though," laughed Harry.

"Would you leave your ranch?" questioned Terry's mother. "The chickens and the turkey and the buffalo calf and this cabin and the fencing you've worked so hard for and the land you've cleared? You couldn't take those, to go mining in the mountains."

"Huh!" reflected Terry. "I'll show them to him,

first. Perhaps he'd rather stay. Cracky, but he'll be surprised."

However, Father Richards slept on; he was still asleep at bed-time, when Terry and the other men climbed into the loft, and Mother Richards prepared to lie down on a pallet of buffalo robes and blankets, near the bed, with Shep to keep her company.

The morning broke fair. Terry opened his eyes into brightness. Evidently the sky had cleared and the sun was shining, and they all had slept rather late. He listened intently—but nobody was talking, below. His father had not waked, or else he had gone to sleep again.

Mother Richards, though, was stirring about, getting breakfast; the aroma of coffee floated up into the loft, and Terry followed close after Harry and Sol, down the ladder. His mother put her finger on her lips, and shook her head, as token that they all should be quiet. She had drawn the curtains before the bed. When Terry peeked in between them, he saw his father lying almost exactly as he had been lying, the evening before.

"He did not move, the night through," whispered Mother Richards.

"That's all right," stated Sol. "It's the best medicine."

"But he'll wake up some time, won't he?" persisted Terry. "Do you think he'll know us, Sol?"

"Might—and again he might not. Let him have his sleep out, and then maybe you can jog his memory a trifle."

"We must be patient, Terry boy," added Harry. "You know *him*, anyway, and here he is, safe. That's one comfort."

So they sat down to breakfast. Outside, the snow had drifted to the window sills; the world was a dazzling white. Assuredly, a great change had come upon the ranch, within twenty-four hours. But nobody cared. There was plenty of wood and food, the animals all were snugly housed, here in the cabin it was warm and bright, and Father Richards had come home—Terry himself had brought him.

They were in the midst of breakfast, when the bed creaked and the curtains waved. A voice feebly spoke. Something doing, yonder! Up sprang Terry's mother; hastened over, Terry at her heels. She threw open the curtains. Father Richards was half sitting, gazing.

For a moment he looked upon them, they looked upon him.

"Why——," he murmured.

"Don't you know me, Ralph?" asked Terry's mother. "You're home. This is Mary, and that is Terry."

"And the ranch is all ready," burst Terry. "The grasshoppers ate us, but we put in more stuff, and we've got a cow and a calf and a tame turkey and a lot of fences, and a partner, and I killed a panther, and so did Shep and Harry,"

"Sh!" warned Terry's mother. "Don't you remember us, Ralph?" she entreated.

Father Richards was stroking his beard with his

hand—a familiar gesture; but his eyes were wide and puzzled.

“Remember? Why—just who are you, and how came I here?”

“Get that letter,” advised Sol. “It’ll jog him.”

“Where is it?” said Harry, now jumping up, also.

“No. Wait!” cried Terry. He ran for the hat on the peg, grabbed it off, and thrust it into his father’s hand. “There! Don’t you know that old hat, dad?”

Father Richards turned it over, examining it inside and out. Suddenly his face lighted right up, and he snapped his fingers exultantly.

“That’s my hat!” he declared, in full, natural voice. “Now I remember. I lost it, didn’t I? Wore it out from Ohio! By *ginger*! I started from the mountains—how I got here I can’t say, but you’re Mary, and you’re Terry, and there’s Shep—old Shep! Hooray!”

“Hooray!” echoed Terry.

How the three hugged and kissed. Terry’s mother finally straightened up, flushed and radiant.

“Oh!” she uttered, looking around as if scarcely decided whether to laugh or cry with joy. “What a merry Christmas we’re going to have!”

END

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